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"ANGELA, SIR REGINALD, WHAT IS THE MATTER?" CRIED LADY WHARTON, EXCITEDLY.

HER SAILOR LOVER.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

ANGELA WHARTON was standing in the level sunset light, leaning her arms on the top bar of the gate at the end of Melcombe-lane, and listening intently for the sound of the footstep that would presently greet her ears. Standing thus she made a very pretty picture—a tall, lithe limbed girl of nineteen, with great flashing dark eyes, cheeks tinted like deep red carnations, and masses of wavy hair, twisted in burnished coils round her head. But though she was waiting for her lover, her expression was not altogether one of perfect content; some stormy unrest brooded in the fathomless wells of her eyes, above which the level brows knitted themselves in a straight line of half defiant remembrance.

"Here first, my darling!" said a man's voice

close at her elbow, "I am so sorry. It is not often I keep you waiting, is it?"

She turned quickly, all the petulance vanishing from her face, while her eyes lighted up with the gladness of welcome. The new comer was a young sailor of four or five and twenty, tall, handsome, and determined looking—a lover of whom any girl might well be proud.

"You have not kept me waiting now, Jack. It is not eight o'clock yet, but I could not stay in the house any longer, so I came here on the chance of your being before the time. I wanted to get as far away from The Towers as I could."

Jack Craven drew her to him, then taking her face between his two hands, gazed into it long and lovingly. He flattered himself that he could read it as easily as an open book, and the signs of recent tears on the cheeks did not escape his keen eyes.

"What is the matter, my darling?" he asked, softly, slipping his arm round her waist, and drawing her head down on his shoulder.

"Have they been behaving badly to you again up at The Towers?"

"It is Sybil—it is always Sybil!"—was the girl's passionate retort. "I believe my aunt

would be all right if Sybil did not try her utmost to prejudice her against me. Oh, she is cruel—cruel! She never lets slip one opportunity of taunting me with my poverty, my dependence, my inferior birth, and the more bitterly she can humiliate me, the better she is pleased. I hate her—oh, how I hate her!"

"Hush!" said Jack, in a distressed voice, "you shouldn't say that Angela."

"I know I shouldn't, but I can't help it. That's the worst part of it Jack—Sybil has the power of waking up everything that is evil in me, until I despise myself for my own wickedness. I think she knows this, and glories in it."

Jack Craven sighed, while he stroked the soft thick masses of hair that waved above his lady love's brow. She was no patient Griselda, this beautiful Angela, but a proud, wilful, passionate woman, generous to a fault, capable of the utmost devotion, and yet intensely human in her weaknesses.

"I wish I could marry you off hand, and leave the rest to fate," he murmured. "Shall I do this Angela—will you come up to London with me to-morrow, and marry me at a Registrar's Office, and then I will take you to an old aunt of

mine, where you will at least be beyond the reach of your cousin's insults!"

The girl looked eagerly up into his face, the rich carmine flooding her cheeks in a deeper wave. Then she shook her head.

"What about your ship, Jack?"

"Never mind about that."

"But you ought to be aboard to-morrow!"

"I know. Still anything is better than your misery."

"What, even your disgrace?"

He looked away, while the trouble in his eyes grew greater. Heaven only knew what it cost him to make the proposal.

"No!" said Angela, drawing a long breath, "I won't let you cut yourself off from all your chances in such a mad fashion. I must possess my soul in patience until you come back, and in looking forward to seeing you again I shall be able to defy Sybil and every other unpleasant thing. What a wretch I am to bother you with my foolish little troubles just as you are going away!" she added, remorsefully, nestling closer to him. "I did not intend that you should even suspect their existence this evening, Jack!"

"I know you did not, sweetheart, but love's eyes are keen—keener than you give them credit for," he rejoined, smiling tenderly into her upturned face. "I cannot bear the thought of leaving you with no one to look after you while I am away. Oh, this terrible poverty! If I were only a rich man I would leave the service, and we could get married at once."

"But that is quite out of the question," she said, with an attempt to speak playfully. "We have discussed it before, and always with the same result. You have nothing, I have less, because I am a woman, and therefore more or less helpless—mind, that is not my own opinion, but it would be the opinion of nine-tenths of those sensible people who sit in judgment on romantic marriages."

"I know, but it doesn't follow that we need mind the sensible people, if we bring about our own happiness by defying them."

"And your ruined prospects and your uncle's anger—what about them?"

"They are nothing in comparison with your love, my dearest."

She put up her hand and gently stroked his cheek.

"Ah, Jack, I like to hear you say that, but it does not convince me that I should be justified in letting you sacrifice yourself for me. No; we are both young, and we must both wait—that's all. At any rate, we must wait till you come back, and then, perhaps, your uncle will have withdrawn his opposition, and give his consent to our marriage."

"If he doesn't give his consent I shall take it for granted," said the young man, grimly. "I would not let his displeasure have any weight with me if he hadn't brought me up and been very good to me in the past, but I confess the idea of breaking my word to him pains me horribly. I promised I would not marry until I returned from this voyage, and by that time I hope he will have changed his mind."

"And he hopes you will have changed yours! I wonder,"—with a little pathetic smile—"how it is that I am looked upon as such a very undesirable person. Nobody seems to care to cultivate my society, and so far as I know I have not a single friend. Is there anything about me different to other girls, Jack?"

"Nothing, except that you are fifty times more beautiful and fascinating," he returned, but his tone was uneasy, and he would not meet her eyes. "Have you brought that portrait you promised me, Angela?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid it is not very like me; however, your imagination must fill in the details."

She held it out to him, a little cheap photograph, that poor Angela had saved up her very scanty pocket-money to have taken for her lover. It gave but a very faint idea of the beauty of the original, nevertheless Jack gazed at it as rapturously as if it had been an Academy miniature, and before putting it carefully away in his pocket he pressed his lips to it.

"I expect I shall do that pretty often between

now and the next time I see you, darling," he said, congratulating himself upon having so successfully turned the conversation from an awkward topic. "How often shall you write to me, Angela?"

"As often as I can, it will be my one solace."

She tried to speak brightly, but there was a sob in her voice. However, she controlled herself and added in a lighter tone,—

"And you must promise to think of me *always* Jack. You know I am very jealous, and I should resent your thinking of anybody else for even five minutes in the day!"

"No fear of that. But are you really jealous, Angela?"

"I think so, I am afraid so. I don't mean that I have ever felt actually jealous of you, but sometimes I have tried to think of the possibility of your caring for anyone else, and then—ah then my brain seemed on fire." She shuddered. "Tell me again that you love me, Jack, and that you will love me *always*—always—always!"

He gave her the required assurance, repeating it over and over again while her heart beat against his, and his lips pressed passionate kisses on hers.

And so the golden moments slipped away. Dusk drew her purple veil over the rich, dim land, the star flowers blossomed in heaven's blue garden above, and a nightingale began to sing from one of the trees in the plantation at the other end of the lane. Then there came the sound of a clock striking, the signal to the lovers that they must part.

A few more passionate protestations then one last long lingering kiss, and Jack tore himself away; while Angela turned round and slowly retraced her steps towards the ivy-covered house with its two battlemented towers, which was her home.

On the threshold she was met by her cousin Sybil Wharton, a small, slight, blue-eyed girl, whom some people might have called pretty, but who looked faded and insignificant by the side of beautiful Angela. Perhaps Sybil knew this, and the knowledge had something to do with the spitefulness of her tone as she said,—

"Dear me, Angela, is that you? Why it has struck ten o'clock, and I thought no one was wandering about the grounds except, perhaps, the scullery-maid and her sweetheart."

"You were wrong then, you see," returned Angela, composedly.

"So I observe, but I think, if I were you, I would not make assignments at such an hour. It has a decidedly vulgar air, and I'm afraid if my mother knew of it, she might say one or two rather sharp things to you."

"That is very likely. It would not be the first time she has done so."

"And so far as I can judge, it won't be the last time if you go on in this way. I suppose you have been bidding a fond farewell to Jack Craven?"

"You suppose rightly."

"And to-morrow he sails away to some fresh love. You know what sailors are—a sweetheart in every port. One can hardly blame him, for he is so good-looking that girls are sure to run after him, just as you have done."

"I have not run after him!" flashed Angela, her cheeks crimsoned red.

Sybil laughed, a little mocking laugh, with a sting in each ripple of it.

"You need not trouble to deny it, my dear, when it has been so patent to all the world. However, men will amuse themselves, and he is no better than his fellows, but I wouldn't put too much faith in his promises if I were you. Of course he will never marry you, and even if he wanted to his uncle would never let him. Miss Angela Wharton is not exactly the sort of person people care to welcome into their family."

And with this parting shaft Sybil entered the drawing-room, while Angela slowly made her way to her own bed-chamber, which was at the top of the house—a sparsely furnished little room, whose only decorations were the sketches and water-colours executed by herself, which adorned the walls.

This room had been witness to many passionate outbursts of sorrow on the part of poor

Angela. It was her one retreat when the satire of Sybil, and the snubs of Lady Wharton had driven her from the drawing-room, and hot and bitter were the tears which had watered the uncarpeted boards. To night she sat at the window, which she threw wide open, and looked wistfully out into the moonlight, while, in spite of all her endeavours, those cruel words of her cousin came back to her.

"Of course he will never marry you . . . Miss Angela Wharton is not the sort of person people care to welcome into their family!"

Was there some hidden meaning in this taunt of Sybil's? It was not the first time she had said such things, goading poor Angela well nigh to madness by her sneers. Many and many a time the girl would have run away; and tried to work for her own living, but for a promise she had given her father on his dying-bed.

"Swear to me," he had said, "that no consideration in the world shall induce you to leave your aunt's roof until you marry."

And Angela had given her solemn promise.

At last she rose from her lowly seat and began slowly to undress herself. The moonbeams streamed in at the open casement, making a wide silver radiance on the floor, and the young girl could not find it in her heart to draw the blind, and shut them out. Her last thought as she lay down was of Jack—her bold, handsome sailor lover, who, in spite of all Sybil might say, would assuredly come back in due time and make her his wife. How long she slept she could not afterwards have told, but she woke quite suddenly at the pressure of soft warm lips on hers. Yes, some one was kissing her, she was sure of it, though when she sat up in bed and looked around her with startled eyes, she could see no one.

The moonlight still shined in, but its radiance was narrower, telling that the moon had sunk lower in the heavens.

Angela sprang out of bed, and carefully searched the chamber.

It had no occupant but herself, no trace of intrusion even, and for a moment the young girl was inclined to believe she must have been dreaming.

Then she shook her head, with the certainty that this was not the case—it was impossible a dream could have been half so vivid.

Strange as it might be, the conviction still remained that someone had been in the room, and had really kissed her.

Who it was, must remain a mystery.

CHAPTER II.

It was June when Jack Craven sailed, and for Angela the time dragged on very slowly until summer had given place to autumn, and September had filled The Towers with its usual party of guests.

Meanwhile she had had no letter from her lover, and though she did her best to console herself with the thought that he had been unavoidably prevented from writing, there were moments when she was tormented by agonising doubts of his constancy.

These doubts might have died if left to themselves, but they were often fanned into a flame by small hints and innuendoes on the part of Sybil, who never lost an opportunity of taunting her cousin.

As a rule, when there was company at The Towers, Angela was kept in the background, and indeed, this was in accordance with her own wish.

She was an intensely proud girl, and hated the idea of mixing with smart people, who by reason of her poverty, might look down upon her.

Besides she possessed but a very scanty wardrobe, which numbered only one evening dress among its contents. A black lace that had seen much active service, and was considerably the worse for it.

Lady Wharton herself was poor, and could hardly afford Sybil the many extravagances she required, nevertheless she made a point of seeing that she was dressed to the best advantage, for

all her hopes were pinned on the prospect of her daughter making a brilliant marriage.

Until this event was consummated, she did not see how she could afford to spend anything on her niece.

Thus it happened that although Angela knew a party of half a dozen guests were now assembled at The Towers, she had not seen one of them until a late September afternoon when she was coming back from the village, whither she had been to execute some commission for her aunt.

On her way through the plantation that formed a short cut to The Towers, she was brought to a standstill by the sight of a gentleman in shooting attire sitting on the gnarled roots of one of the trees, against which his gun was propped.

He made an attempt to rise as she passed, but the attempt was a failure, and only elicited a half stifled groan.

"Have you hurt yourself, can I help you in any way?" she asked, sympathetically.

"You are very good," he returned, and there was no mistaking the admiration in his eyes, as they dwelt for a moment on her richly tinted face. "I think I have sprained my foot, anyhow I can't put it to the ground without considerable pain. I am staying at The Towers—how far is that away?"

"Not more than a quarter of a mile. You are Sir Reginald Verney?" she added, interrogatively.

"Yes," looking slightly surprised. "How did you know?"

"Because I am Lady Wharton's niece, and I saw you go out with the keepers this morning."

"Did you really? How was it then, you didn't come with the other ladies, to have luncheon with us in the covert?"

Her face clouded, she shrugged her shoulders over so slightly.

"Because I do not go out into society."

"That is society's loss," he said, in a tone that redeemed the words from mere empty compliment.

He was a good-looking man of five or six and thirty, and had quite lately come into a title, and large estates.

Sybil had met him in London during the season, and he had paid her attentions which had been construed by her mother as meaning "something serious." Hence he had been invited to The Towers, and Angela knew that both her aunt and Sybil were hoping that he would declare himself before he left.

"Shall I go up to the house and send assistance to you?" she said, after a moment's pause. "Or do you think, as the distance is so short, you could manage it with the help of my arm?"

"I should not like to trouble you so much, otherwise with your kind aid—"

She laughed, and there was a slight updrawal of her magnificent figure.

"Pray don't hesitate to make use of me, Sir Reginald. I assure you I am strong enough to give you the help I offer. You see there are consolations for being five feet eight and a half, although I am often inclined to envy the sylph-like proportions of my smaller sisters."

"You have certainly no occasion to envy anyone," he said, with emphasis, as he dragged himself upright, and took her arm.

Angela's boast was not a vain one. She was as strong and active and agile as a young panther, and as full of vitality.

The Baronet had of necessity, to lean upon her a good deal; but with a stick that she lent him, in the other hand, he contrived to make very fair progress, and, in spite of his pain, he was very sorry when the house was reached.

They found no one at home. The gentlemen had not returned from their shooting, the ladies were still out driving.

Sir Reginald addressed Angela entreatingly.

"You will be so kind as to give me a cup of tea, Miss Wharton?"

"Certainly, if you wish it. But won't you have your foot bathed and seen to first?"

"That can wait. Some tea is a necessity."

Thus Angela found herself a few minutes later

presiding at the tea table in the fine old hall, which was wainscotted with oak, and luxuriously furnished with Eastern rugs, gold embroidered screens, tall palms in brass pots, deep comfortable arm chairs and lounges, and lighted by the ruddy gleam of a great fire of scented pine knots.

Sir Reginald, his foot pillowed on a stool, watched her as her strong and yet delicate fingers hovered over the old Worcester china, and he told himself that he had never in his life seen such a beautiful creature.

Angela was perfectly aware of the impression she was making, but she was no coquette, and his admiration left her utterly unmoved and indifferent.

So far as she was concerned there was only one man in the world, and his name was Jack Craven, and yet she found that half hour spent in the firelit hall very pleasant.

Sir Reginald was a man who had travelled much, and seen a good deal of the world, and his conversation was undoubtedly interesting.

Neither of the two betrayed unqualified delight when the door was thrown open, and Lady Wharton, Sybil, and two other ladies entered.

"Angela!" exclaimed her aunt, looking from one to the other, "I thought you had gone to take my note to the Rectory."

"I have been, and come back," was Angela's tranquil reply.

"Your niece has been playing the part of ministering angel to me, Lady Wharton," said the Baronet, and then he proceeded to state in what way he had made the young girl's acquaintance, while his hostess did her best to conceal her annoyance, and Sybil came to his side, asking him anxiously if he had sent for a doctor to examine his foot.

"I am afraid I had partly forgotten it was injured," he answered, laughing. "While it is lying at rest, as it is at the present moment, it does not hurt me. It is only when I attempt to move that I feel the twinges."

"But a doctor ought to have been sent for at once, Angela should have seen to that," exclaimed Sybil, with a spiteful glance in her cousin's direction, while she rang the bell in a way that betrayed her irritation.

Sir Reginald, who was a fairly keen observer, thought it wise to conciliate her.

"Won't you come and sit by me, and tell me what you have been doing since luncheon, while your cousin gives you a cup of tea!" he said, indicating a chair close to his own, on which the young lady seated herself, her thin red lips relaxing into a smile.

"I think it is you who should tell me what you have been doing," she answered, taking the tea from Angela's hand, while the other ladies grouped themselves round the table. "You must have been behaving badly or you wouldn't have hurt your foot."

"Is that your way of rendering 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do!'" he asked, laughing. "I'm afraid you have about hit the mark. I will make a confession. I lingered behind to eat some nuts I found on a hazel bush, and I stayed so long that I thought it would be no good trying to catch the other fellows up, so I turned back, intending to get to The Towers in time for tea."

"Which intention you fulfilled," she remarked, drily.

"Yes, but hardly in the way I had anticipated."

For a second his eyes rested on Angela, but they came back to Sybil almost immediately.

"Now that I have acknowledged my transgression, will you give me absolution?"

"I don't know, I am not quite sure. It is a serious matter, and requires some consideration. I'll tell you after dinner, perhaps."

Meanwhile Angela was talking to the elder of the two strange ladies, who was the widowed Countess of Tranmore—a great lady, of whom her hostess stood somewhat in awe.

She was a charming-looking woman of about five-and-forty, with iron-grey hair which she wore rolled high over a cushion, and dark eyes lighting up a curiously bright complexion.

After Angela had withdrawn, she turned to Lady Wharton.

"Your niece is most fascinating. How is it we have not seen her before?"

Lady Wharton looked a trifle embarrassed. "She is very young, she has hardly left the schoolroom."

"But she must be eighteen or more!"

"She is nearly nineteen."

"Quite time she was out," said the Countess, with what her hostess called very bad taste. "Pray, my dear Lady Wharton, let us have the pleasure of her society this evening. It will be a delightful addition to our party."

Lady Wharton bowed with a very bad grace, but the Countess was both rich and fashionable. She entertained largely, and it would never do to offend her.

"I suppose Angela must be asked in to dinner?" she said to her daughter later on; and Sybil, with a cloud on her brow, was forced to acquiesce.

For some reason or other Sybil took especial pains with her toilette that night, and came down radiant in pale sea-green satin, and delicate foamy laces; pearls round her throat and arms, and in the coils of her fair hair, a long spray of exotics in her corsage. She looked her best, and she knew it as well from her mirrors as from the compliment with which Sir Richard Verney greeted her.

"You only want a wreath of seaweed and coral to convert you into a veritable sea nymph!" he said to her as she entered the drawing-room.

"Have you seen the doctor?" she asked.

"Yes; and he tells me I have strained my foot, not sprained it; and it will be all right in a few days. Meanwhile I shall have to rest, and hop about on two sticks. Not a very lively prospect, is it?"

Sybil did not answer. Her eyes were fixed on her cousin who came in at that moment. She wore her shabby old black-lace dress, but somehow on her it looked neither old nor shabby. She had cut it low, and edged it with a deep fall of rich lace which she had hunted up from among her possessions, and which lent it an air of picturesque-ness that Sybil's own attire lacked.

Angela's beautiful neck and arms were bare, but their fine modelling could well dispense with ornaments. She had pinned a bunch of deep red roses at her breast and a single bud in her hair; the petals of the roses could not boast a lovelier bloom than her cheeks, and her eyes shone with the liquid splendour of stars mirrored in deep, still pools of water.

"How lovely!" murmured Sir Reginald involuntarily, and half below his breath. But low as the words were spoken Sybil heard them, and a fierce pang of envy gripped her heart. How she hated Angela at that moment!

"Yes," she said as indifferently as she could manage. "She is a pretty girl, isn't she! But she is so cold and proud that one really cannot approach her very closely. Although I have lived with her for so many years, and tried my best to pierce through the mantle of reserve in which she wraps herself, I have never yet succeeded. She is just as far off from me as on the day I first saw her."

"She did not strike me as being reserved," Sybil laughed disagreeably.

"Perhaps not. I believe she unbends to your sex more than to her own. So at least, I have heard Jack Craven say."

"Jack Craven!" repeated the Baronet. "Does she know him?"

"They are engaged."

"Impossible!"

"Why impossible?" queried Sybil, glancing at him with interest. "Do you know young Craven?"

"Very well indeed. I saw him a few weeks ago at Malta, and then he said no word of being engaged; in point of fact, he—"

Sir Reginald hesitated, but Sybil said, imperatively,—

"Go on with your story. It would never do to leave it half told."

"Well, then, he was very much in the society of a handsome widow named Molyneux, and rumour had it they were engaged. Anyhow, he got leave of absence from his ship, and accompanied her to the Levant, presumably with the intention of being married. There was some

mystery about this lady, no one knew exactly who she was, or whence she came, but she was rich and extremely handsome, and Jack was evidently very far gone. I expect they are married by now."

CHAPTER III.

ANGELA stood in front of her toilet-table slowly unfasting the roses from her bodice.

The evening had been one of triumph from beginning to end.

Lady Tranmore had singled her out for special attention, and Sir Reginald Verney, in spite of policy, had been quite unable to conceal the admiration her beauty excited in him.

Angela liked notice—what young girl does not!—but in spite of this, she sighed as she laid the drooping flowers on the table. Their scent brought back that June evening when she and Jack had stood together in Melcombe-lane, when his arms had been round her, his lips had pressed their passionate kisses on hers. Why did he not write! Surely he had not forgotten her already!

"No, Jack, no, I am sure of your love!" she cried, aloud, ashamed of the thought as she became conscious of it. "Whatever else may fail me, you, at least, will be true!"

She stretched out her arms to the stars shining in through the open window.

At the same moment there came a smart tap at the door, followed almost immediately by the entrance of Sybil. She had exchanged her dinner-dress for a blue cashmere dressing-gown, her cheeks were flushed, she gave one the impression of being unusually excited—as indeed she was.

"You look surprised to see me," she observed, with a little mirthless laugh, as she seated herself on the least uncomfortable chair she could find.

"I am," replied Angela, frankly. "It isn't often you honour me with a visit here."

"It isn't often I have news for you like I have this evening. Prepare yourself for a surprise—a shock, but for goodness sake don't cry out or make a scene. Jack Craven is married—or if he isn't already he will be soon. There! Confess I haven't climbed all these stairs for nothing."

Sybil had spent about the most miserable evening her life had ever known, but she was amply avenged for it now.

Angela stood very still, facing her, every vestige of colour drained from her cheeks, her very lips white. For a moment she did not speak, then she exclaimed, violently,—

"It is not true—I will not believe it! It is a hideous lie that you have invented to deceive me!"

The elder girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Believe it, or disbelieve it, as you like. It is true all the same. I am quite willing to give you my authority."

"Who is it?"

"Sir Reginald Verney. He knows the lady—a beautiful widow named Molyneux. He told me all about it this evening just before dinner; but I would not mention it for fear of your saying or doing something stupid. Come Angela, don't give yourself away!" she exclaimed, sharply, feeling slightly uncomfortable as she looked up at the stricken face before her. "You are not the only girl in the world to whom a man has behaved badly, and you'll get over it in time."

"Get over it!" repeated Angela, stupidly, "get over it!" Her voice changed, understanding seemed to come to her, she clasped both her hands in front of her so strenuously that the nails pierced the tender white flesh. "I shall never get over it if it is true—never—never! I shall carry it with me to my grave. But it is not true!" she cried again, passionately. "There is some mistake—there must be!"

"Then it is on the part of Sir Reginald Verney. You are quite at liberty to appeal to him if you doubt me. He is down there on the terrace."

Sybil pointed below, to where the burning point of a cigar glowed redly in the darkness, but she was utterly unprepared for having her words taken literally.

In a moment Angela had fled from the room,

and a few seconds later she was out on the terrace by the side of the astonished Baronet, who threw away his cigar as he recognised her.

"Sir Reginald!" she exclaimed, ignoring his look of surprise, and speaking with the earnestness of one who is conscious only of her purpose. "Is it true that Jack Craven is either married or going to marry a widow in Malta?"

He seemed staggered by the downright question, but answered it immediately.

"To the best of my belief it is, Miss Wharton."

She caught her breath sharply, and half turned away so that he should not see the expression on her face. His grave voice carried conviction with it. She might doubt the truth of Sybil's words, but there was no doubting Sir Reginald Verney.

"I am sorry if what I have said grieves you," he went on in a low tone, "I am sorry as well to say anything to the disadvantage of Craven, who is my cousin, and a very good fellow to boot; but all Malta was ringing with the story of his devotion to Mrs. Molyneux and I myself frequently saw them together."

She made a slight, swift gesture with her hand and then stood still, while the moonlight poured on her bare white throat and arms, and shone on the lustrous coils of her hair.

"Had you not better go in?" he said, gently. "You have no shawl, and these September nights are chilly."

"Yes, you are right, I will go," she returned, in a dull voice that he hardly recognised as hers; and without another word she left him, feeling as if the world had suddenly changed into a great, cold void. The night that followed was a very terrible one, but even yet she would not quite give up hope. It was possible after all that Jack might be able to explain.

She wrote to him a wild, passionate, half distraught epistle, telling him what she had heard, imploring him to contradict it, to assure her of his faith, to tell her that he still loved her, and then she prepared to wait with what patience she might for his reply.

Early in the morning she set out for the village post-office, and dropped her letter into the box herself. Poor, proud, beautiful Angela! She felt horribly desolate and friendless as she walked slowly back. If she had only a friend in whom she might confide! But there was no one—not a creature in the wide world to whom she could go for sympathy.

As she was passing her aunt's boudoir, the door opened and Sybil stood on the threshold.

"My mother wishes to speak to you," she said, coldly, standing aside to let her cousin pass in, and then closing the door after her.

Lady Wharton, who was a chilly, little, fair-haired creature, was nestling coily down in an arm chair close to the fire. But there was a knitting of her brows, and a firm closing of her lips that denoted both annoyance and determination.

"Sybil has been telling me of your extraordinary behaviour of last night," she said, looking at her niece with unqualified disapproval. "Has it not struck you that you acted with a great lack of prudence, as well as of modesty in running out to Sir Reginald Verney at midnight, and standing alone on the terrace with him for I don't know how long!"

A wave of crimson rushed over the girl's face, her eyes fell.

"I did not think of that," she murmured.

"Then you should have done so. You are old enough to know the value of maidenly reserve, and you should think of me and your cousin, even if you do not value it for yourself. You have been very indiscreet, and are greatly to blame. I am extremely angry with you, and under the circumstances I do not care for you to remain in the house while my guests are here. I have therefore wired to my sister in London to expect you this evening, and you will be good enough to pack up your things, and be ready to start by the twelve o'clock train."

Angela stared at her in amazement completely taken aback by the suddenness of the plan.

"I am very sorry if I have done wrong, Aunt Augusta," she said, penitently. "I was excited last night, and not quite answerable for what I

did, but surely there is no necessity to send me away like this!"

"That is for me to decide, and I have decided. My sister, Mrs. Mostyn has telegraphed her willingness to have you for a month, and you will therefore go to her for that time. There is no more to be said."

Lady Wharton returned to the fire again, with a gesture of dismissal, and Angela walked slowly out of the room. Remonstrances she saw were useless. She would have to go, so she might as well go quietly; but her heart swelled with indignation. She had fathomed the meaning of this arrangement, which was evidently prompted by jealousy on Sybil's part, and for the purpose of getting her out of the way. Both mother and daughter had noticed Sir Reginald's admiration, and had decided she was far too dangerous a rival to fight against openly, so they had concocted this plot for removing her from the Baronet's neighbourhood with as little delay as possible.

At twelve o'clock the dog-cart was at the door, and the young girl, with her portmanteau and bonnet box—she had not much luggage to pack!—was driven to the station. Sir Reginald, in the morning-room which faced another way, heard the sound of wheels, and asked Sybil, who had challenged him to a game of chess, if her mother was taking Lady Tranmore out for a drive. He did not remember, until afterwards, that she had put him off with an evasive answer.

Once on her way, borne rapidly through the autumn-tinted landscape, Angela's spirits began to return. She had made arrangements with the housekeeper at The Towers, that her letters should be forwarded on immediately, and now hope once more asserted itself. She did not care for her exile, for Sybil's jealousy, or her aunt's injustice, she cared for nothing, if only Jack might be proved true!

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. MOSTYN was an invalid, living in a small house at Highgate, and as she rarely went out, Angela was left pretty much to her own devices. No letter came to her, and her heart grew sick with the bitterness of hope deferred. She read the newspapers every day in the hope of gaining some news of Jack, and at last her search was rewarded, for she saw his name under the heading "Desertion by a Naval Officer." Then followed an account of how he had applied for leave of absence, which had been granted, but when the leave expired he had not returned. The paragraph went on to say that there could be no doubt he had eloped with a rich and beautiful widow, well known in Malta, who had confessedly accompanied him on his journey, and of whom nothing had since been heard.

Poor Angela! The iron had indeed entered her soul. There could be no doubting the truth now. If death had come to her she would have welcomed it gladly, but she was young and strong, and healthy, and there was nothing in her appearance save her pale cheeks and listless manner, to tell that for her the joy of life was dead.

It was arranged that she should return to The Towers in the middle of October, and the day before that on which she was to travel, she went to London to do some commissions for Mrs. Mostyn. On her way out of one of the drapers' shops in Bond-street, she saw a carriage and a pair of magnificent bays drawn up close to the pavement; a lady was stepping out assisted by a tall footman with powdered hair. The lady was her cousin Sybil, and in the carriage sat Lady Tranmore.

"Good gracious, Angela, what brings you here?" exclaimed Sybil, by no means delighted at the rencontre.

Her coldness, however, was fully made up for by the warmth of the Countess, who expressed her pleasure at seeing the young girl again.

"I was so sorry you left The Towers in such a hurry," she said, "I had looked forward to seeing a good deal of you. Where are you staying?"

Angela told her, adding that she was returning home the next day.

"We—that is your cousin who is visiting me—and I go to my place in the country to-morrow. Why shouldn't you come with us?"

Angela, in confusion, murmured something about the necessity of being at The Towers, but Lady Tranmore only laughed.

"My dear, there is not the slightest necessity in the world for it. Your aunt is in Scotland, your cousin with me. You would be insufferably dull at The Towers, while at Tranmore Court you will be—well, not dull. I insist upon your coming, and I myself will write and tell Lady Wharton that I left you no choice in the matter. There! does that satisfy you?"

Sybil tried to put in a remonstrance, but the Countess would not listen to it. She had quite made up her mind that Angela should come and stay with her, and she was not a woman accustomed to contradiction.

In the end she had her own way, and the next day, to Angela's great astonishment she found herself ensconced in a reserved saloon, supplied with books, papers, flowers, and magazines, and travelling with Sybil and the Countess to Warwickshire.

Tranmore Court was a delightful old place, of uncertain architecture, completely covered with ivy. The park and grounds were extensive, and it boasted a finer hall than that of The Towers. Here, on the evening of their arrival, the ladies sat having tea, and here they were joined later on, by four more guests, a Colonel and Mrs. Hutchinson, Lord Sinclair, and Sir Reginald Verney.

After greeting his hostess and Sybil, the young Baronet took a seat next to Angela.

"This is a pleasure as great as it is unexpected, Miss Wharton. I hardly dared hope to see you again before Christmas."

"Why do you say before Christmas?"

"Because Lady Wharton asked me to spend it at The Towers. I assure you," he added, dropping his voice so as not to be overheard by the others, "I do not speak with merely conventional politeness when I say I am overjoyed to see you."

The colour mounted a little higher to the girl's cheeks, and she raised her beautiful eyes to give him a grateful glance. Lonely, and unloved as she felt herself to be, his evident sincerity touched her.

"You are very kind, Sir Reginald—kinder than I deserve I am afraid."

"In my opinion nothing that the world could give you would be higher than your deserts," he responded, still in a low tone, but with an ardent look that was lost upon Angela, but which, unfortunately, Sybil intercepted. The Baronet did not leave his place until it was time to dress for dinner, and then he rose with evident reluctance. His companion had not talked much it is true, but she had been a sympathetic listener, and it had been quite enough for Sir Reginald to feast his eyes on the beautiful curves of her profile, the sad little mouth, the wonderful length and thickness of her curled lashes. He confessed to himself that he was fast losing both head and heart.

The two cousins had rooms adjoining, and as Angela entered hers, Sybil followed. She was very pale, there was a steely gleam in her blue grey eyes threatening danger.

"There are one or two hints I think I had better give you, Angela," she said, with an odd little forced laugh, as she went up to the fireplace, and warmed one small silk-shod foot on the fender. "You are not used to society and its ways. I am, and I know how easy it is for a girl to get herself talked about. If you continue to behave as you did this afternoon people will assuredly say disagreeable things."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that it is bad form for you to flirt as you flirted with Sir Reginald Verney."

"I did not flirt!" cried the young girl, indignantly. "I never thought of such a thing."

Sybil's lips curved sceptically.

"I'm afraid that is rather more than one can believe. You ought to know by this time that men are always willing to amuse themselves at a

girl's expense; but it is the girls, not they, who suffer afterwards. You are good looking, and therefore Sir Reginald pays you attention; but his attentions mean nothing at all. He is simply flirting with you as he has flirted with dozens of girls before you, but such flirtation could not possibly end in anything serious. He would never marry you—never."

It is impossible to describe the biting irony, the studied insult implied by her words and manner.

Angela faced her without flinching.

"You are very kind, Sybil, oh, very kind! I appreciate to the full the affectionate thoughtfulness that induced you to give me this warning. As it happens the thought of marriage has never once entered my head in connection with Sir Reginald, though it was quite easy to see that that was the stake you yourself were playing for."

The elder girl started slightly and bit her lip. She pressed her handkerchief against it, and when she withdrew it there was a small bright crimson stain on the white cambric. Angela's shot had gone home to its mark.

"I shall not trouble myself to contradict you," Sybil said, steadying her voice by a great effort. "I would only remind you that your mother's fate should be a warning to you."

"My mother's fate! In what way?"

"That she ran away from her husband disgracing herself, her family, and you."

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Angela came down to dinner that night there was a brighter flush than usual on her cheeks, a new expression in her eyes. She looked like one bent on determined action. And indeed this was the case. Sybil's communication, instead of humbling her, had filled her with a desire to show her cousin the full power of her beauty, to repay once and for ever, the long course of insult to which she had been subjected to conquer fate by the sheer strength of her own personality. She did not doubt the truth of what she had heard concerning her mother, it explained many things that had hitherto puzzled her; but she was neither bent nor broken by the shock of the discovery, which simply acted as a brace to her resolution.

Never had she been so beautiful, and never before had she exerted herself in the same way to please. Hitherto she had played the part of listener, now she talked as if she had been a society belle all her life, and was herself as much astonished as her hearers at her own brilliance. She was bright, piquante, and amusing, if at times slightly satirical; but she succeeded very effectively in attracting attention and admiration, and her hostess openly congratulated herself on her good fortune in acquiring such a charming addition to her party.

"My dear, I had no idea you had so much in you," she said, when the ladies had retired to the drawing-room, and Angela laughed aloud at the naïveté of the speech. "You have come out in quite a new character," she added.

"And one that meets with your approval, I hope?"

"Certainly. You are a great acquisition. But how quiet your cousin is to-night!"

"Sybil! Yes."

"Is it because you have made her take a back seat?" whispered Lady Tranmore, maliciously.

"Perhaps," returned Angela, laughing once more, but this time with some bitterness, for although the rôle she was acting pleased her vanity, there was a certain something in her heart that cried out against it.

However, she silenced all scruples, determining that at least she would be consistent, and when Sir Reginald came in from the dining-room she made a coquettish gesture which he answered by at once coming to her side. During the whole of the evening he remained there, and Sybil, from a distant corner of the room, had the pleasure of listening to various comments on the young Baronet's infatuation.

"No doubt as to how the wind blows in that

quarter," Colonel Hutchinson observed; "I never saw a fellow more completely bowled over. But he has a very fair excuse, Miss Angela Wharton is certainly an uncommonly handsome young woman, and with plenty of 'go' in her into the bargain."

The bay window at one end of the room was unshuttered, and through it the moonlight came pouring in clear, and white, and pure in contrast with the shaded yellow radiance of the gas globes.

"Don't you want to see the grounds by moonlight?" Sir Reginald said to his companion. "The night is not at all cold, and I will get you a shawl if you'll come out."

Thus it happened that a few minutes later they were pacing backwards and forwards on the terrace, Angela with a soft silken wrap round her head and shoulders which made a very effective frame for her bright dark face.

"This is a pretty place," she said, looking round at the velvet green sward of the terraces and the glossy laurel foliage shining like mirrors in the sheen of the moonbeams; "I love old houses, especially if they have historical associations."

"You should see Verney Castle," he returned; "it looks as if it had stepped straight out of the middle ages, with its keep and its battlemented towers, and its square of green in the middle."

"I should like to see it."

"I hope you will some day," he said, drawing a little closer, and letting his eyes rest on her face. "It is certainly a splendid old place, although such praise comes rather badly from the owner of it. But I am very proud of my old home. In my eyes it wants only one thing to make it perfect."

"And that is?"

"A mistress."

Angela's eyes fell under his ardent gaze. She began pulling to pieces, rather nervously, some flowers she had taken from her bodice.

"You must take care that its future mistress is in perfect harmony with your beautiful home," she said, after a pause.

"That is true. I have already formed a mental picture of what she must be like. Shall I tell you about it?"

"Yes—if you please."

"In the first place she must be tall—as tall as you are. Then she must be stately, as becomes the mistress of Verney Castle. She must also be beautiful."

"Dark or fair?"

"Oh, dark, decidedly. I used to think I liked fair women best, but lately I have come to quite a different conclusion. Have I succeeded in giving you an idea of what my problematic wife will be?"

"I think so—at least you have given me the broad outlines."

"I will fill in the details if you let me. She must have grey eyes, like yours; she must have a full, but delicate mouth, also like yours. In a word, she must be like you in every particular."

"You pay me a high compliment, Sir Reginald."

"I hope you are not angry with what I have said, Miss Wharton?"

He waited breathlessly for her answer. It did not come quite immediately. The colour had faded from her cheeks, she shivered slightly and drew herself a little farther away. At the same moment a little little figure appeared at the French window, and Sybil's mocking laughter rang out on the still night air.

The sound had an instantaneous effect on the younger girl, and she turned to the Baronet with her former coquettishness.

"On the contrary, Sir Reginald, I am flattered."

He breathed a deep sigh of relief, and laid his hand very lightly on her arm.

"Do not go in yet. Come along the laurel walk, where we shall be free from all chance of interruption. I have something to say to you."

She permitted him to lead her in the direction he indicated, half mechanically, but instinctively she shrank from the touch of his fingers. Happily he did not observe this, but if he had done so he would have attributed it simply to maidenly modesty, and but have admired her the more.

"Miss Wharton," he said, and his voice was

low and hoarse with emotion, "I am going to ask you to be my wife. I hope I have not shocked you with this suddenness. I did not intend saying so much until you knew me better, and I had taught you to love me; but I cannot keep silence, I love you so passionately that at all hazards I must know my fate. Will you marry me?"

It seemed to Angela as if an icy hand gripped her heart. This wooing brought to her mind that other lover, who had said much the same to her in the scented dusk of midsummer evenings—the lover who had been false to her, and whom she had tried her best to forget. But she had not succeeded—she knew it now in this supreme moment, knew too, that as long as life lasted, so long would Jack Craven be lord of it.

"Haven't you a word to say to me?" Sir Reginald exclaimed, in a fever of impatience, finding her silent. "Have I startled you?"

He came closer, and peered into her face—ardently, longingly. She would have been less than woman if she had not been touched by his fervour.

"I will tell you the truth," she said, recovering herself, and speaking in a low, but very distinct voice. "You do me great honour by asking me to marry you, but before I accept you, it is only due to you to say that I have been engaged before, and that the man—you know him, it is Jack Craven—has thrown me over."

Sir Reginald's face changed, then he said hastily,—

"But you do not hold yourself engaged to him now?"

"No."

"Then you will be my wife? I see what you would say—that you do not love me. But Angela, I will teach you to love me. If you will only give me yourself, I will be so true, so devoted, that you will have no alternative but to love me. Everything that affection can suggest, or money can buy, shall be yours. You shall have wealth, position, splendour, and added to these, you shall have love. Ah, darling! Trust yourself to me, and you shall never have cause to regret your decision!"

He was carried away by passion. Without waiting for her reply he drew her close to him, closer, closer, till she could feel the strong beats of his heart, and his lips were pressed on hers in a kiss that sealed their betrothal.

Angela shivered again, but said nothing. She had a curious idea all through of yielding to her fate. She knew that to-morrow she might be bitterly regretting the step she had taken, but retreat would be cut off, and to-night her most prominent thought was that at last she and Sybil could cry "quits!"

With glad pride of possession, Sir Reginald drew her arm through his, and led her back to the drawing-room. Most of the guests were in the billiard-room, but Lady Tranmore and Sybil sat together on a couch, turning over some society journals. The Baronet looked slightly disconcerted at the sight of Sybil, for conscience told him that he had given her some sort of ground for believing that he cared for her. Still, that was in bygone days, and before he had seen Angela. One glance at the beautiful girl, leaning on his arm, gave him renewed confidence.

"Lady Tranmore, I have some news for you. Allow me to present to you my future wife!"

Angela's eyes met Sybil's. In that one moment was wiped off the bitterness and miseries of many years.

CHAPTER VI.

THE engagement was publicly announced, and Sir Reginald was anxious the wedding should take place with as little delay as possible. His fiancée had no reason to urge against it, and the day was therefore fixed for the second in the new year. Lady Wharton had given her consent, because there was really nothing else left for her to do, but only she and Sybil knew what a bitter mortification this wedding would be to both. Sybil, indeed, had to acknowledge herself beaten all along the line, and she was not sure her own

conduct had not hastened the results she feared—a fact that did not add to her affection for her cousin. She did her best to conceal her feelings however, but each day only added to their intensity. As much as she could love anyone, she had loved Sir Reginald, but now her love had turned to hatred. He had put upon her the deepest slight it was possible for him to offer her, and deep down in Sybil's heart smouldered the fires of revenge which only required a touch to fan them into flame.

As for Angela, the time passed by in a sort of dream. After leaving Tranmore, she returned home to The Towers, and at once began to make preparations for her trousseau. Nearly every day brought presents from her betrothed; now it was a necklace of pearls, then a coronet of diamonds, another morning a fine sapphire bracelet. A few months ago these magnificent gifts would have filled her with delight, but they had lost their power to charm her now; she received them all with a cold indifference that surprised herself. Nevertheless Sir Reginald's devotion was not without its effect on her.

"I will make him a good wife," she said to herself, "I will be dutiful, thoughtful, and obedient, and never if I can help it, shall he have reason to regret his choice. He is very good, and I like him very much. Perhaps he is right, and liking may in time grow to love. I only hope it will."

And to the days passed on. Sir Reginald spent Christmas at The Towers, and proved himself the most devoted of lovers. Then he went home again for a few days, and returned the night before the wedding was to take place.

The day dawned dull and misty. A white fog lay in the hollows in the park and floated wraith-like in ragged festoons from the leafless trees.

Angela shivered as she glanced out of her window, while her maid Janet helped her into the shimmering folds of her satin gown, and then adorned her with the magnificent diamonds that had been the bridegroom's wedding-gift.

"You look lovely, miss, downright lovely," said the girl, standing a little way off so as to see the result of her handiwork more clearly. "You're the handsomest bride I ever see, only you are very pale. You ought to let me put a touch of rouge on your cheeks, you can't think what an improvement it would be!"

But Angela shook her head, and at that moment her cousin came in, holding a small parcel in her hand.

She dismissed the maid, then eyed Angela from head to foot in a curiously deliberate fashion that was rather disconcerting.

"Yes, you make a charming bride, it spite of your pallor," she said, slowly. "It is a pity the day is not more favourable. You know the old saying, 'Happy is the bride the sun shines on.'"

"I don't suppose the sun or its absence will make much difference to me."

"Perhaps not. I have brought you my wedding present. Don't be startled when you see it."

She undid the silver paper in which the parcel was wrapped, and presented it.

Angela, with a few words of thanks, opened the box, and could not refrain from a slight exclamation as she saw its contents—a small, silver-mounted, and exquisitely-chased revolver.

"It is an odd present you'll say," went on Sybil, with the same strange smile; "but you have had so many things given you that there was nothing else for me to fall back upon. And after all you may find it useful you know. Sir Reginald talks of taking you round the world, and in that case you'll require to be armed."

Angela murmured a few words of thanks, and laid the dangerous toy down on the toilet table.

"You see there are a dozen cartridges, so it is quite ready for use," added Sybil. "I suppose it is time for us to go now. It will never do to keep the impatient bridegroom waiting."

Angela followed her downstairs, looking back over her shoulder once or twice with a weird sensation of some one pursuing her.

This idea haunted her all the while she was driving to church, and gave her a presentiment that after all something would prevent the conclusion of the wedding ceremony.

Even when she stood at the altar with Sir Reginald—proud, happy, and handsome, by her side—she could not avoid casting a startled glance behind her as if to see whether, amongst the numerous spectators there might not be one who would even at this last minute, come forward to forbid the marriage.

But no. Only smiling faces of friends and neighbours met her gaze, and even now the clergyman was putting the question,—

"Wilt thou, Angela, take Reginald for thy wedded husband?"

Hardly above a whisper came her reply. Her lips were whiter than the flowers crowning her hair, her voice trembled. With an involuntary movement she put up one hand to her eyes as if to shut out some terrible vision.

The face of Jack Craven, tender and reproachful rose before her, she could hardly prevent his name from escaping her lips.

The effort to keep her self-possession was tremendous, but she succeeded until she was in the carriage, driving home with her newly-made husband.

"Darling!" he whispered, bending down to kiss her; but she pushed him away.

"Don't touch me, leave me alone!" she cried, incoherently, shrinking back to her corner of the carriage, and covering her face with her hands.

Sir Reginald obeyed, but with a slightly hurt expression. Still he was a philosopher in his way, and he had an idea that all women, under the influence of great excitement, were apt to become hysterical. No doubt that was the case with his wife at the present moment.

How she sat through the wedding-breakfast and the speeches she never afterwards knew. People remarked how white and silent she was, and wondered at the meaning of those frightened glances. Later on they guessed the truth.

At last she went upstairs, and at her own request, alone, to change her dress. Lately she had been given a bed, dressing, and sitting-room on the first floor, instead of her little upstairs attic, and at the door of the dressing-room, her maid stood waiting.

She was a girl who had been at The Towers for some years as sewing maid, and was therefore pretty well acquainted with the family. Pre-occupied as she was Angela was struck by the expression of her face.

"What is the matter?" she asked, pausing.

"Oh, my lady, I don't know that I have done right, but he begged so hard, and I couldn't resist! Mr. Craven is in the sitting-room. He came round to the side door and I happened to see him, and he looked so ill that for the minute I thought he was his own ghost. He said he must and would speak to you, and I thought the only way to save a dreadful scene would be to bring him up here."

Angela leaned against the wall, and looked so white and rigid, that Janet thought she was going to faint, but a few seconds later she had thrown open the door of the sitting-room, and staggered forward, hardly knowing what she was doing.

In the middle of the room stood Jack Craven, a pale, thin image of his former self, but with the same deep love shining out of his handsome eyes. As Angela saw him, all remembrance of her wifehood and his supposed falseness passed from her. She only knew that he was the one man in the world she cared for, her sailor lover, to whom her heart was given for weal or woe, but for ever, and for ever!

"Jack, Jack!" she cried, and in another moment she lay across his breast, sobbing hysterically clasped close to him, and conscious of nothing but that they were together!

"Why did you not come before, oh, why did you not come before?" she exclaimed at last, when coherent words would frame themselves.

"I could not. I was taken prisoner by brigands in Turkey, and kept by them in hiding until a few weeks ago, and then I was so weak and ill from the long confinement that I could not travel half so quickly as I wished. If I had but known what I was coming back to I would have stayed away altogether!" he concluded bitterly.

He unlaced her clinging arms, and put her from him, his eyes growing stern.

"But they told me you were false, they said you were a deserter from your ship, and you had run away to marry another woman—a widow!" she cried frantically.

"And you believed it!"

"What alternative had I? The news was given me by a man of honour who would not condescend to a lie, and I read of your desertion in the newspapers. How could I doubt it? If you tell me it was false I will believe you."

"That I cared for, or wished to marry any woman save yourself, is a cruel lie. But that I went away to Turkey with Mrs. Molyneux, who is evidently the lady referred to, I am willing to admit. It was during that journey that we were both taken prisoners, and she died in captivity. But although the journey was taken ostensibly on her behalf, it was really for your sake, Angela."

"For mine!"

"Yes, because she was your mother, who after the death of your father had married a Mr. Molyneux and was again a widow. Do you remember our last meeting in Melcombe-lane? Well, she saw us there together, and afterwards by dint of bribing a servant made her way up to your room, just to kiss you in your sleep. Do you remember it?"

Angela made a gesture of assent. This explained the mysterious occurrence which had so puzzled her at the time.

"She had come to England for no other purpose than to see you, and she returned to Malta by my ship, so that we saw a good deal of each other, and knowing that I was engaged to you, she confided to me, under the seal of secrecy, who she was, and how, when she was quite a young bride, she had, in a fit of desperation against the jealous tyranny of her husband, fled from home—but alone. Afterwards she wished to return, but this was not permitted her, neither was she allowed to see you, so she took refuge with some relations who were living in Russia, and remained with them until your father died. He had exacted a promise from her not to attempt to hold any communication with you until you were twenty-one, but I persuaded her that such a promise ought not to be kept. I told her you were unhappy with your aunt, and would rejoice to welcome her, and she accordingly resolved to come to England again; but first of all it was necessary for her to realise part of the fortune left her by Mr. Molyneux, who had been a Levantine merchant, and it was in order to help her in this that I applied for leave of absence, and prepared to accompany her to Turkey. On our journey we were taken prisoners. Now have I cleared myself in your eyes, Angela?"

His hands lay on her shoulder, and he looked steadfastly into her face. There was no doubting the absolute sincerity of his own, and it was borne in on the girl how, by her wilful pride, she had wrecked the happiness of both their lives.

With a low moan of utter despair she sank down on a couch, the glistening folds of her wedding-dress billowing round her; her bouquet lying crushed and withered, on the carpet at her feet.

Suddenly she sprang up again, and came close to him, the colour flashing into lips and cheeks.

"Jack, take me away with you—now—at once! Surely a few words, spoken in ignorance of the truth, ought not to be allowed to come between us! I love you, Jack, you and you only. I shall love you to my life's end, and in the sight of Heaven I shall be your wife!"

Jack's face grew ashen, the temptation was a terrible one, and for a moment it well nigh overcame him. Strong man as he was, he trembled from head to foot, and he had to moisten his lips before the words would come through.

"But your husband, Angela!"

"He is not my husband!" she cried vehemently. "I never loved him, I never pretended to do so."

She threw out her hand in her eagerness and her eyes fell on the plain band of gold encircling the third finger.

The sight of it had a strange effect on her; it seemed to emphasise, and bring home to her the fact that she was really a wife, and with the comprehension a sudden revulsion of feeling came over her.

"Oh, I am wicked, I am very wicked!" she muttered, half to herself, "I must have been mad to speak so—indeed, I know not whether I am mad or sane at the present moment, I only know that I am of all women the most wretched—"

Then came a sharp, imperative knock at the door, and a voice outside demanded admittance.

The sound of it recalled Jack and Angela to the exigencies of the situation, and its compromising nature—facts to which neither had hitherto given a thought.

It was Jack who recovered himself first, and his first idea was that at all hazards she must be saved from the consequences of his imprudence.

"Go through to the other room!" he whispered, pointing to the door of communication, "and I will bolt this door and contrive my escape in some other way. Good-bye—Heaven bless you!"

CHAPTER VII.

ANGELA entered the dressing-room closing the door behind her, and then stood for a moment like some marble image of despair, as she found herself confronted by her husband, who had come in from the corridor.

He looked at her attentively, keenly alive to the agitation of her demeanour.

"What, not changed your dress yet?" he exclaimed. "What have you been doing all this time?"

To her, his gaze seemed stern and accusing, and she put out her hand to grasp the corner of the dressing-table for support. She tried to speak, but the words died on her lips.

"Surely I heard voices in there," he added, striding across the room towards the boudoir. "The tones seemed to me like a man's."

Angela's self-possession completely deserted her; all she could think of was the consequences that might follow a meeting between her lover and her husband.

Half distraught with the emotions she had gone through, she flung herself before Sir Reginald, and barred his progress.

"You must not go in there—I say you must not, you shall not!" she cried, incoherently.

"But I say I shall and will!" he returned, and he imperatively pushed her on one side, and without more ado, turned the handle of the door, unconscious of, or wilfully unheeding the fact that his wife lay stretched on the floor in a dead faint.

How long she remained thus she could not tell, but consciousness came to her swiftly and suddenly, as the sound of a shot, apparently quite close at hand struck across the silence.

It was followed by a heavy fall, and a deep groan.

Angela staggered to her feet, pressing her hands across her temples, in a vain effort to still their throbbing. She went towards the door, but paused for a moment on the threshold, in deadly terror of what might be revealed to her.

It was cowardly, she knew, but it must be remembered that her nerves were thoroughly unhinged by the events of the morning.

At last, with a great effort, she summoned her flagging courage and stepped inside, almost with a presentiment of what she would see—the form, of her husband, prone on the floor, a deep red stain soaking slowly through his clothes. But for him, the room was empty.

In a moment she was kneeling at his side raising his head on her arm, her heart full of most pitiful compassion—all other thoughts forgotten in the one supreme fear of his danger.

"Reginald, Reginald!" she exclaimed, in an agony, "speak to me—only one word to assure me that you live. It is I—Angela—your wife."

Very slowly his eyes opened and rested on her face, but there was no recognition in them.

"Jack Craven!" he muttered, hoarsely, "yes, it was Jack Craven—"

His voice died away in an unintelligible whisper, and his eyes closed again, his head fell, a dead weight, on her arm.

She drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and

with it tried to staunch the flow of blood, then she looked into his face.

Its utter stillness, and marble pallor told their own tale. Sir Reginald was dead.

Very reverently and tenderly, she laid his head down on the carpet, gazing around her in a half bewildered way that failed to realise the full horror of the position.

Her eyes fell on a pistol lying some distance from the dead man. She picked it up and recognised it as the one Sybil had given her for a wedding present that morning. Was it really only that morning? Why, it seemed months ago!

As she held it in her hand, looking at it curiously, comprehension was slowly beating itself into her dulled brain.

Those last words of her husband's—what did they mean? What but that Jack Craven had fired the fatal shot that killed him!

"Angela, Sir Reginald, what is the matter?" cried an excited voice, and the door was thrown open hurriedly, while Lady Wharton, and two or three frightened servants stood on the threshold.

"Great Heaven's! Angela, you are covered with blood!"

The girl looked down at her white satin dress, stained crimson, from contact with her husband, but she said nothing.

Standing perfectly still with the pistol yet in her hand, she saw all that followed in a far off sort of fashion—saw her aunt's horror when she beheld the rigid form of Sir Reginald, heard the hasty commands to fetch a doctor, and then encountered with stony indifference, Lady Wharton's accusing gaze.

"Do you see that your husband is dead, Angela?"

"Yes."

"Cruelly and foully murdered!"

"Yes," said Angela, once again, without moving a muscle, her voice dull and level.

"And you hold in your hand the weapon which killed him! What does it mean?"

A shudder stirred her limbs, the revolver dropped from her nerveless fingers.

With a hurried movement of command, Lady Wharton signified to the servants to leave the room, and she, her daughter, and the white-faced bride were left alone together.

There could be no doubt that the elder lady was very strongly agitated.

"Wretched girl!" she exclaimed, with a gesture of horror. "What induced you to commit this horrible crime?"

"Commit this crime—I?" repeated Angela, dumbfounded by a charge, the possibility of which had not once entered her mind.

She was silent for a moment, then in a curiously slow voice, she said,—

"Do you really think it was I who killed Sir Reginald?"

"I have no doubt of it—no doubt is possible, seeing that no one else has been near this room, and that we all saw you with the pistol in your hand. And to think that you should bring this disgrace on your family!"

Lady Wharton wrung her hands despairingly.

Personally she had not a shadow of doubt of her niece's guilt, but her primary idea was how the credit of her name might best be saved.

She was a woman whom emergencies seldom found lacking, and even as she stood facing her niece, and with that still white body at her feet, a hundred different plans suggested themselves to her busy brain.

"You must leave the house at once," she exclaimed, dropping her voice to a low and urgent whisper. "Change your dress, put on your oldest and least noticeable clothes, and see if you cannot contrive to get to London to-night. Once there, it will be easy for you to remain in hiding, until you have an opportunity of escaping to America. I will supply you with as much money as you can possibly need, and then at least we shall be spared the ignominy of seeing you in a felon's dock."

Sybil had up to the present said no word, but now she chimed in hastily,—

"Yes, that is much the best plan. Come

Angela, rouse yourself! You have not a minute to lose."

But when they would have hurried the unhappy bride into the next room, she resisted, and at the same time seemed to recover from the species of stupor that had fallen upon her.

"No," she said, resolutely. "Whatever I may be, I am not cowardly enough to run away. I will stay and face whatever may betide."

And from this determination she did not falter.

The thought had struck her that so long as she was supposed to be guilty, so long would suspicion be averted from Jack, and he would be able to make good his escape.

After all, that was all she cared for. She had wronged him, but by this sacrifice, atonement would be made. What did it matter whether the world held her innocent or guilty, so long as Jack was safe?

"You are as foolish as you are wicked!" exclaimed her aunt, angrily. "Will no persuasion move you? Think of the dangerous position in which you will find yourself, think of—"

The girl interrupted her unceremoniously.

"I have told you my decision, it is irrevocable. Do you imagine for one moment that I care what becomes of me? When women are as miserable as I am, they are ready to welcome death."

The whole county rang with the news of the murder.

A Baronet shot on his wedding-day, and by the hand of his wife! Such a thing was unheard of, and might well cause excitement.

All the local papers were full of details of the crime—mostly imaginative, for there was in reality very little known about it. Put briefly the affair stood thus,—

Lady Verney had gone upstairs after the breakfast, to change her wedding dress for travelling attire, and at her own wish, she had gone alone. Some time afterwards, finding she did not come down her husband had gone in search of her, and less than ten minutes later a shot had been heard from the boudoir, which formed part of the bride's suite of rooms. On entering Lady Wharton, her daughter, and two or three servants had been horrified at the sight of the Baronet lying dead on the ground, while his wife stood near him, her garments stained with blood, and the weapon with which the crime was committed, still in her grasp. Of her guilt there could be no doubt, and the fact that she absolutely refused to say a word either of denial or exculpation, only made the matter more mysterious. She was at once placed under arrest, and a coroner's inquest resulted in a verdict of "wilful murder" being brought in against her.

Of course rumour was busy with the motive for the crime. Some people whispered darkly of certain episodes in Sir Reginald's past that had been communicated to the young bride on her wedding morning, by a strange man who had been seen making his way towards The Towers shortly after the ceremony had taken place. Others said that she had never cared for Sir Reginald, and recalled the time when she had been seen walking in the park with handsome Jack Craven, before he went away to join his ship. But on all sides it was agreed that the murder was a very terrible one, and that its perpetrator deserved no mercy.

Over The Towers a dark cloud of shame and sorrow hung. Lady Wharton was wounded in her most vulnerable part—family pride, and Sybil too, felt the position very deeply. She grew thin, and pale and haggard, an incessant restlessness took possession of her, she would roam from room to room like some unquiet spirit, and her changed appearance added in no small degree to her mother's anxiety.

"For Heaven's sake, don't appear so utterly miserable!" Lady Wharton exclaimed, one afternoon, when she had been vainly trying to persuade the girl to go out for a drive with her. "You can do no good by fretting over this miserable business, and you are getting to look quite old and withered."

Sybil shrugged her shoulders listlessly.

"I don't think I care much how I look now," she returned, with indifference.

Her mother gazed at her keenly.

"I confess I fail to understand this attitude of yours. It is not as if you were fond of Angela."

"Fond of her!" Sybil's brows knitted themselves together above her sombre eyes. "No. It is not likely I should be fond of her, when she has been the means of taking from me all I cared for in life." She paced backwards and forwards once or twice, her bosom heaving, her excitement gathering intensity. Suddenly she threw herself on her knees beside Lady Wharton's chair, "Mother I must speak, though I know I am nothing but a fool for my pains. I cannot keep it locked up in my own bosom any longer. Reginald Verney was the one man in the world I ever cared for—aye, and he would have loved me too, and made me his wife if Angela, with her wicked witch's beauty had not come between us! It is not for her fate I am sorrowing—she deserves the worst that justice can give her!—but for his. When I saw him lying there, stiff and dead, in the pride of his manhood, all the bitterness that had been in my heart against him suddenly vanished, and I only remembered my love. Life without him, seems a miserable blank. I shall never recover the shock of his death, never, never!"

She burst into a storm of sobs so violent that they actually seemed as if they must tear her in pieces.

Lady Wharton, surprised and distressed by this outburst, tried her best to soothe her, but with only partial success. She had never imagined her daughter possessed deep feelings, and this betrayal of them came upon her as a revelation.

It explained, in some wise, Sybil's attitude of late, and the changes that had come over her, and her mother could only hope that time would bring with it forgetfulness, and consolation.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANGELA sat in her prison cell, on the edge of the bed, her hands clasped on her lap, her eyes fixed on vacancy.

She was pale certainly, but there was determination in her face, a set resolve in the firm lines of the mouth. She realised her position to the full, but she was not in the least degree appalled by it, and never once did her resolution waver to save Jack Craven, even if her own life were the forfeit.

Before her arrest she had contrived to exact a promise from Janet to make no mention of the fact that the young sailor had been at The Towers, and this promise Janet had given the more readily, because she fancied that to mention it would but prejudice her mistress's case. For the maid, in common with the rest of the household, fully believed in Lady Verney's guilt.

There was a rattling of the lock, and a warder threw open the door to admit a visitor. Angela looked up listlessly, then sprang to her feet, her face changing.

"Jack!" she murmured, below her breath. "Why, oh, why have you come? I thought you were out of the country."

"So I was," he replied, taking both her hands and holding them close in his, while his eyes dwelt on her face with mingled sadness and rapture. "When I quitted The Towers on that terrible day, I went straight to Italy without stopping, and it was not until I had been there a few days that I heard of the terrible catastrophe that must have occurred directly after I left the house, and of your arrest. After that I did not lose a minute in coming to you. My darling!—I may call you so now—did you think that though all the world deserted you I would follow suit? Did you not know that my faith in you would never let me believe you capable of committing such a crime as you are charged with?"

It is impossible to describe the tenderness of his voice and manner, and the pity in his candid eyes.

She gazed up at him bewilderedly, her breath wellnigh taken away by the thoughts that crowded in upon her.

"But, Jack!" she exclaimed, incoherently,

"what do you mean by saying that the murder"—she shuddered as she spoke the word—"took place after you left The Towers?"

"Because just as I was in the shrubbery I heard the report of a shot. I could not tell in the least where it came from, and so I hurried on, without paying much attention to it. If I had suspected the truth I should have come back at once."

His eyes met hers with a fearless candour that could not possibly have been simulated. This was not the gaze of a guilty man, his tone and words were not those of a murderer.

In a moment Angela felt convinced that all this time she had been the victim of a gigantic mistake. Whoever had killed Sir Reginald it was not Jack Craven!

The revulsion of feeling was so great that for a few minutes she could not speak, but her head fell forward on his shoulder, and a prayer of thankfulness went up from the very depths of her heart to Heaven for its mercy.

"Forgive me, Jack! oh, forgive me! for having misjudged you so!" she cried, at last. "I thought—I thought that you had fired that fatal shot."

He put her a little away from him, and looked at her with incredulous surprise. Then a light of comprehension dawned on him.

"And thinking thus you determined to shield me! This is the reason, then, that you have refused to answer any questions, and have allowed yourself to remain under this dreadful imputation? I see it all, now. It is true you have misjudged me, but surely your loyalty has made atonement! Thank Heaven I was able to get here in time to save you from the consequences of your belief. To me, at least, you will tell all you know of the circumstances attending Sir Reginald's death."

(Continued on page 356.)

A WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHRISTMAS came and passed. It was spent in cheery fashion at Lady Agnes' comfortable roomy country house. Each day Patricia passed under her aunt's roof showed a marked improvement in her looks and health. Maxton was more than satisfied at this improvement.

Lady Agnes and the maid had many quiet little chats about the girl unknown to her, and though she felt with a good deal of resentment that her mother would care very little now, Lady Agnes considered it her duty to send out a report to the Duchess de Milleriois of Patricia's improved condition.

"Constance, of course, never realised how ill the child was," Lady Agnes Blanquerville said to her husband when the subject was introduced between them. She was loyal outwardly to her beautiful sister, though her heart condemned her so strongly.

"Constance has always developed a happy knack of never realising anything except her own pleasure, my dear," Mr. Blanquerville made answer on more than one occasion, and then he generally laughed. "She would declare, of course, she inherited this trait from the Mount-eagle family. You know, Aggie, I can never be sufficiently grateful that you do not take after your illustrious ancestors in the same way as your sister Constance."

"There is a great difference between Constance and your wife, George," Lady Agnes said, not without a true woman's sigh of regret that such beauty as her sister possessed had not been given to her also.

"By Jove! yes, there is a vast difference, and the advantage is all on your side, my dear."

George Blanquerville let his hand rest tenderly for a moment on his wife's pretty white one.

The great affection and sympathy that existed between her uncle and aunt was a never failing source of pleasure to Patricia to watch. She was

very fond of Mr. Blanqueville; she admired his great talents, and liked his straightforward honest nature. The girl was, in fact, very nearly quite happy in the present circumstances.

The atmosphere of the life was most congenial to her. Here she was not dragged into a kind of frivolous society for which she was utterly unsuited. Unshadowed by her mother's brilliant presence, and unsilenced by the autocratic will which belonged so peculiarly to that mother, the girl seemed to expand and grow just as some wind-nipped flower will rear its delicate head and regain its freshness when brought into the atmosphere of a warm room. Her aunt's real kindness had always touched Pat, and with George Blanqueville she would sit and talk on deep subjects in such an earnest knowledgeable way that the other guests in the house regarded her with admiration, and, indeed, with some awe also. Thorold was one of these.

He found himself listening to Patricia unconsciously. She had a charming voice, low and well modulated, but it was the girl's intellect rather than any of her physical qualifications that roused Thorold's interest and admiration.

He remembered every now and then he had had much the same admiration for her brother, Lord Settefeld, that bygone October day when they had first met and had talked together.

Thorold knew now, through the likeness to the sister, that the qualities he had admired so much in Settefeld that day were one and all well founded, that he was a man to be listened to carefully, not on one subject but on many. Every now and then Patricia would betray the history of the past, the story of her deep lasting love.

"Danvers used to tell me that!"

"Danvers and I read that together!"

"I remember Danvers had that very same idea, Uncle George. Perhaps you read his article in *The Nineteenth Century* that he wrote on this subject."

These and many other little speeches uttered so eagerly, and with that lingering tenderness which never left her voice when her brother's name was mentioned, sketched out before Thorold in the most vivid manner the story of the more than usual love and sympathy that had lived so strongly, so deeply between brother and sister.

He would have known this if even Lady Agnes had not enlightened him on the truth of this fact.

"You have no conception what Pat's love for Settefeld has always been. As children they were inseparable, though, of course, Danvers was always much older than Pat. I loved to see them together; it was the prettiest sight in the world. They studied together until Danvers went to Eton. You know Patricia is most magnificently educated."

"I know she has a most unusual mind," Thorold said, thoughtfully.

"Just what Lowestoft said," Lady Agnes cried, mentioning the eminent statesman and writer who, as has been stated before, honoured the girl with his admiration and friendship. "I shall never forget how alarmed my sister was when she heard this," Lady Agnes laughed slightly. "Very beautiful women are seldom very clever, you know, and they do not admire great brains in their own sex, but there is more in Patricia than brains—she is a sweet nature—a true woman. I hope before long I may see her married to some man who will not only love but understand her. Patricia should make an ideal wife."

Thorold followed Lady Agnes' eyes across the room to where Patricia sat listening eagerly to a most interesting conversation between her uncle and his nephew Neville Blanqueville. He had a tender sensation at his heart when he looked on Patricia. It was not a thrill or a strongly moved emotion such as had been wont to come when his eyes had rested on Miriam and her wonderful loveliness. It was something much more akin to brotherhood, or to that clinging love he had had so strongly developed for his mother.

He seemed to realise little by little what an irreparable loss her brother's marriage might prove to be to Patricia. These little stories of her early life (anecdotes of her grief over her brother's enforced absence at school, of her wild

delight at his return, of her eager pride in his success) had a pathetic touch for Thorold.

Tuned as he was by his own blighted hopes to a note of sadness he understood, perhaps even better now than he would have done before, the personal grief that must mingle in with the girl's joy over her brother's new life.

But was there any joy! Thorold felt a little troubled on this point. The young man had noticed, not at first but by degrees, that Patricia avoided all participations in discussing her new sister-in-law.

He was of course far, very far, from imagining the full truth. The love that still ached and yearned in his heart, of course shut away all suggestions of the truth; still it seemed to him that the girl had not any keen degree of happiness in her brother's marriage.

He knew her now too well to impute to her the wrong that other meaner natures might have done in setting down her silence entirely to jealousy.

Thorold acquitted Patricia of the least shade of jealousy. All mean, base things were, he felt, assured impossible to her, but he could not rid his mind of the thought that she was very sad.

He was still so deeply attached to his broken dream that it hurt him to think this girl's beautiful heart should not turn willingly to Miriam, to the creature who had seemed to him the living embodiment of an angel. All was still so shrouded in mystery for Thorold. In touching the matter of Miriam's marriage, that bitterness against the woman he had loved, and still did love, had not as yet begun even to form itself in his thoughts.

He had only a weary sense of disappointment, a desire to escape thought, and one keen vivid feeling, a strong yearning hope, that he might never see Miriam again. It cost him something terrible to realise the meaning of this hope, this prayer. He was very strong, very brave, but with all his strength and courage he shrank in every fibre of his being against the ordeal, that a meeting with Lord Settefeld's newly-made wife must be for him. The very thought of this made him wince. He comforted himself, however, by saying that this pain he could at least be spared. True he was now in the home of her husband's nearest relations, but he was but a passing guest. In another twenty-four hours he would be gone, back once again in his old hard-working life, and he could take good care to guard himself from any and every chance of meeting Lord and Lady Settefeld in the future. Their world was not his; there was nothing to ever take him into Miriam's beautiful presence again. So we arrange in our own minds, counting blindly on our strength and skill to carry our plans through, and so it happens that ninety-nine times out of a hundred circumstances prove that we are justified in so arranging, but the hundredth time comes sometimes, and it came to Thorold Musgrove on the very last day of his visit to Lady Agnes Blanqueville.

The news arrived so unexpectedly.

The whole party were assembled at the luncheon table when a telegram was handed to Lady Agnes.

She gave a sharp cry of astonishment and excitement as she opened and read its contents:

"Well, here is an honour indeed!" she exclaimed.

"Pat darling, what do you think. The bride and bridegroom are in England, they crossed from Paris last night. This is sent from Dover. They are coming here as fast as they can come! I am really so surprised I hardly know where I am!" Patricia flushed a hot scarlet for an instant, then she grew ashen white. A pang went through her as she took the telegram and read the message, but the pang was for another, not for herself. How would he bear this?—how could she help him? That was the swift sharp thought that formed itself first in the girl's mind.

Mrs. Blanqueville was quietly amused at his wife's bewildered expression.

"Well, you will have your hands full now with a vengeance, my dear," he said laughingly, "you are in your zenith, Aggie!"

But Lady Agnes did not see matters in the

same light. The excitement gone she was conscious of an irritated sensation.

"I am not in the least in my zenith, my dear George!" she answered almost sharply.

"I am very much bothered. This house is not elastic you know, and besides it is such short notice. What on earth can have made them change their plans so soon! The last I heard was that they were going to be abroad until quite the end of January at any rate. Well Miriam will have to put up with a little discomfort, it is not my fault! Of course, if I had had proper warning I would have done my best to arrange things well!"

"If Miriam in any way resembles her good old father, she will know how to rough it and be as happy as possible during the process," Mr. Blanqueville remarked, with a note of sincere friendship in his voice as he spoke of Sir Francis Stapleton.

Lady Agnes ate her lunch in a pre-occupied way.

Patricia had finished perusing the telegram, and had laid it beside her plate.

"You will take my room, Aunt Agnes," she said, her voice and manner betraying none of the agitation she felt at this unexpected change in events; "it is far too large for me. Maxton always frightens me into fits every night by suggesting a ghost in each corner, and, as the corners are so far off, I cannot possibly see if she is right or wrong."

Thorold spoke next. There was a hurrying and yet a muffled sound in his speech which only one person caught and understood.

"I was going to-morrow, Lady Agnes, as you know. You will permit me to hasten my departure."

"My room also is at your disposal," Neville Blanqueville observed quickly.

Lady Agnes showed real temper now, and her husband laughed outright at her annoyance.

"As if I shall permit anyone of you to go or change your plans in the very least. Mr. Musgrove, you simply shall not leave us; nor you either, Neville. How dare you propose it? Pat, my dear, I may, perhaps, consider your offer conditionally, if I cannot come to any other arrangement."

"I suppose Belton Towers is all unprepared to receive them?" Mr. Blanqueville said at this juncture.

"Of course," Lady Agnes answered, a little testily. "The place has been shut up for over a year. Besides, they cannot think of going there in a quiet, humdrum fashion; there will have to be a regular 'home coming,' with flags and flowers, and bands, and Heaven knows what!"

"An envious prospect!" exclaimed Neville Blanqueville. He was looking a little curiously at Lady Patricia as he ate his pheasant leisurely.

The girl was evidently putting some strong constraint upon herself. She smiled when her aunt spoke, but the man's keen eyes saw that the smile came with an effort.

"What is it, I wonder?" he said to himself. "Somehow, I feel that this girl will never be able to pull with Settefeld's wife; she knows very little of the fair Miriam, but if there were two natures absolutely different, those natures belong to Lady Settefeld and to this girl. It will be interesting if not amusing to watch results."

After luncheon the party dispersed.

Lady Agnes went to prepare her household for the coming arrivals, her irritation passing from her hospitable mind as she went.

Patricia offered her services but there was nothing she could do. Her aunt told her to take her book and sit cosily by the fire.

"You have been for a long walk this morning," she said, "and this will be an exhausting and trying day for you, Pat; although you are so much better, you are still an invalid, and want all the rest possible."

The girl obeyed commands.

She took her book into the library but she did not read. Her thoughts were too busy, too manifold, too troubled.

She trembled at the thought of seeing her brother again so soon, even though her heart had a touch of the old yearning at so doing. She

shrank from meeting Miriam. She must be prepared for all kinds of stings and little sufferances.

She felt only too sure Miriam would never forgive her for holding aloof. And then Patricia suddenly forgot her own discomfort to remember what this must mean to Thorold Musgrove. She had seen that white, hunted look come over his face as her aunt had proclaimed Miriam's message.

She had not as yet learned to love in the sense that he loved, yet she seemed to understand his feeling so well. She had refrained from looking at him, from speaking to him, but she longed with all the warmth and strength of her sweet womanhood to stand now between him and the pain that meeting with her brother's wife must bring.

If she had known how to do it she would have worked so that he might be able to get away before Miriam arrived.

But what could she do? Thorold had never spoken outright to her, he had only confided a little of his hopes and dreams to her.

Miriam's name had never been mentioned by him.

To let him know she knew everything would be to hurt him keenly. She knew that he realised that she knew he had a sorrow, but to put that sorrow in its proper form before them was impossible.

There was a great sympathy between them. The remembrance of the promise asked and given must always link them together in sympathy, but whatever each might think, neither had spoken out definitely and for all that Thorold actually knew Patricia might imagine the coming of her brother and his wife to be absolutely an uneventful thing in the man's life with no connection whatever with his own lost dream, his disappointment.

She could do nothing, then, only grieve for him and hope that the ordeal might not be too hard.

There was the old grief, the old dread, mingling in with her feelings for her brother. Patricia wished in a dumb, despairing sort of way that thought might be taken from her and peace be sent to her in its place.

She wondered if Danvers had realised that she was with her aunt and how he would meet her?

How long she had sat by the library fire she did not know. The servant had come in now and then to replenish the fire, but no one else had invaded her solitude.

By-and-bye Patricia rose with a weary sigh. She always spent one hour each afternoon with the sick boy Francis. She put down her book and went upstairs to the pleasant room set apart for the one being so dear to the mother and father's heart, the bright, happy, suffering creature to whom they clung so fondly, but whom Patricia's eyes could see was passing only too slowly and surely away from them and their love.

The room was occupied when she entered. A man's figure was kneeling and stooping over a big plan laid out on the floor where the sick boy could follow every line.

Francis gave an excited little cry as Patricia appeared.

"Oh! come along Pat, dear, it is so interesting. Mr. Musgrove is showing me how a railway bridge is built and thrown across a river. Come and look, Pat. Come and sit here. No, don't stop please, Mr. Musgrove, Pat will like it, she is so clever; she knows all about these things."

Lady Patricia gave a little laugh.

"Don't talk nonsense, Frankie," she said, but she went and sat beside him on his couch and garnered his poor thin weak hand in both of hers.

Her heart had a new touch of tenderness for Thorold in this moment.

It was no new thing to find him up here amusing the sick boy.

Indeed, during the short week he had known him, Francis had grown to love the big, strong young man almost as much as he loved his parents and his cousin Pat.

Still to-day had Thorold forgotten to pay his customary visit to the invalid's room Patricia's heart would have acquitted him of all neglect, and it touched her deeply to see how earnestly her friend was giving his whole attention to the task of interesting and amusing Francis even

while she felt only too well that the very spirit within him had grown cold, and faint, and weary.

"It isn't nonsense, you know you are awfully clever, Pat, awfully awfully clever," the boy said, warmly, he let his fingers cling to her's. "Isn't it interesting?" he said, eagerly. "Look, Pat, Mr. Musgrove has made it all so clear, I believe," Francis said with a feeble laugh. "I believe I shall be able to build a bridge myself, Pat, after this when I get strong again."

The eyes of the man and the woman met and a mist was over the sight of both.

But it was not only the knowledge of Francis' weakness that brought those tears to Patricia's eyes, it was the intensity of Thorold's pain that hurt her as well.

She knew he was prepared to go through with what lay before him proudly, courageously, but she winced as she conjured up the sufferings he must feel when he came face to face with Miriam again, Miriam lost to him for ever, wife to another man.

How gladly she would have suggested to him an excuse for leaving the house if she could only have known how to do it.

She sat on the sick boy's couch, and listened to the engineering lecture most earnestly.

She noted with quick gratitude how simply the big man explained the most difficult problems to the eager boy.

Thorold was endeared a hundred fold to Patricia de Burgh's great noble heart for the tenderness, the courage, the self-abnegation he showed in this, one of the darkest, hardest hours of his life.

"You are wonderful!" she said once in an involuntary way, "as Frankie says you make it all so clear, Mr. Musgrove, I believe," with her faint, pretty laugh. "I believe even I could build a bridge after hearing all this."

Thorold coloured a little.

"You could do anything you chose to undertake, Lady Patricia," he said gravely.

He had no intention of paying her a compliment. It was the truth he spoke. He had an unlimited admiration for her mental powers, as we know already.

Francis was delighted at this praise.

"There, Pat! what did I say? She is clever, isn't she, Mr. Musgrove? Father says she is a wonder!"

"And of course, whatever father says is sure to be true," Patricia said laughing hurriedly and shyly. Her heart was beating a little quickly at Thorold's words.

"Of course," the boy echoed proudly. His father was the greatest man on earth to him!

The lecture continued for another quarter of an hour, and then it was interrupted by the arrival of Lady Agnes wearing a triumphant expression.

"Everything is arranged at last," she exclaimed. "Pat, darling, I shall not want your room, Hoskins has settled without it. Hoskins is a treasure! and you," laying her hand for an instant on Thorold's shoulders, "you are an angel. How good of you," she said in a low voice as her boy began calling her attention eagerly to the plan on the floor. "I cannot thank you enough for all your thought to my poor baby." Then changing her voice hurriedly, Lady Agnes looked at her niece, "I am going to drive to the station now immediately; but I shall not take you with me, Pat, it is much too cold. You must remain and receive them here, I think you had better dress for dinner before they come, darling."

Patricia only nodded her head.

Thorold noticed she grew very pale and that her lips quivered.

He found himself offering her sympathy almost unconsciously.

"It is a long time since you have seen your brother, is it not, Lady Patricia?" he said gently to her, as they stood a little apart while Lady Agnes sat talking some tender nonsense to her boy.

His gentleness went to Patricia's heart.

The courage of the girl seemed to break all at once. The long, dreary anguish of the past month seemed to force itself from her.

"Oh! a long time, a long time," she said hurriedly, and her voice and eyes were full of tears, "it is only a few months, Mr. Musgrove,

but it seems years since—since we parted last October!"

Thorold went across to open the door for her as she moved swiftly away. He said nothing to her as she passed; but the knowledge of her pain helped him to bear his own. He thought of her so much that he had not time to realise the fulness of the ordeal through which he had to pass.

Thus, unknowingly to themselves, they gave each other comfort and help, and welded still more firmly the link of their mutual liking and sympathy.

This bond of sympathy between them broadened, and deepened, and intensified tremendously in this hour. They had no thought of the future or what might lie beyond. They only remembered that in their mutual sorrow there was a certain sweetness to them both, derived from that sense of reliance, of unflinching faith, of unspoken comprehension which is the keynote to true friendship.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAXTON insisted on her young lady wearing one of her prettiest frocks that evening.

"Not that black thing, my lady!" she cried out in horror, as Patricia would have donned one of her simplest dinner-gowns. "No! no! you must look bright and beautiful, my dear, for the coming home of his lordship and his bride."

Patricia smiled, faintly, at her maid's words and enthusiasm.

"Dear old Maxton," she said, gently, "you will never make me bright nor beautiful, let me wear what I will."

"Shan't I!" inquired Maxton, defiantly, and with the familiarity born of affection and long association. "Shan't I! Just you let me show you, my dear! There's no one can touch you, my lady, when your looking your real self!"

"Well, after that I must say no more," Patricia laughed, faintly. "What am I to wear?"

She resigned herself to the situation. In fact she was glad of any discussion to help pass the moments. Her heart had such a nervous beat, it almost hurt her to feel its throbbing under her hand, she was cold and weak too.

Maxton emerged from a huge wardrobe with a gown of warm crimson *crêpe de Chine*, made in a simple but supremely artistic fashion.

"You'll wear this, if you please, my lady," she said, authoritatively: "there's no one but don't say you look beautiful in this frock for all it's so simple like. It were the general opinion down in the servants' hall, my lady, as you looked a queen on Christmas night, and that's just what you really are, my dear," the maid added, firmly but very tenderly, as she put down the dress on a couch and came forward to brush and arrange the soft clouds of warm, dark brown hair. "Now, I'll twist it in my favourite way," she said, her whole heart in her task, "and you'll put that old jewelled comb what your Aunt Susan gave you on your last birthday at the back, while here, just above your brow, my lady, you'll put that small ruby and diamond star." "Ah!" Maxton said, triumphantly, when her deft hands had finished twisting and coiling the hair and the ornaments were settled to her satisfaction, "Ah! don't tell me I don't know what I'm doing, never again!"

Patricia smiled tremulously at her faithful maid and friend. Maxton was often a source of amusement to her, of comfort always.

She felt constrained to admit too that the maid's efforts were certainly successful when she stood before the mirror a few moments later like some graceful Greek statue, draped in the clinging folds of silken *crêpe*, with the jewelled star gleaming from above her beautiful brow; and the jewelled comb flashing like a diadem from above the dark coils on her small regal little head. Patricia blushed a little at her own image.

"I feel much too grand," she protested; but Maxton would listen to nothing, her sharp ears had caught the sound of wheels outside.

"Quick, quick, my lady, they're here, you must go down at once," she cried, excitedly. "It

won't be no home coming for his lordship if you ain't there to meet him!"

Patricia's blush and smile faded, with her heart thrilling fast. She picked up her gloves and went out of the room, while Maxton stood looking after her.

"My dear," the woman said, tenderly to herself, "please Heaven there'll be no more trouble nor sadness for her now. It were sure there were something, and a big something, too, what came between her and his lordship. There's no getting away from that; but now it will be all forgot, and they'll only remember as how they've met again and they loves one another. In course," Maxton confessed wistfully to herself, "it won't never be quite the same again. A marriage makes all the difference and a wife comes first before all the rest, as is only right and proper. Still, I do hope to see that gray shadow pass away from my dear's sweet face and know that the feet have gone out of her beautiful heart. She've tried to hide from me, but, lor! she couldn't never hide nothing what touches her from my old eyes, I ain't lived with her all these years for nothing!"

Patricia arrived down the stairs just as her uncle came hurrying through the hall from the library.

He stared at her in something like amazement. "Why, Pat, my dear, how lovely you look! Well, the bride and bridegroom can't say they have not something very pretty to greet them on their arrival."

Patricia's eyes looked around, hurriedly. Neville Blanqueville was standing with his back to the fire, wearing a slightly amused expression on his clever rather cynical face, but Thorold Musgrove was nowhere in sight; she was conscious of a great relief.

Then the big door was opened, there was a rush of cold air into the hall, and then there came the sound of a man's voice that was like music to Patricia's ears.

"Danvers! my brother! my darling!" she said, with a little cry of joy.

She was back once again in the old past. Everything was forgotten in this one moment. Her two hands went out to him, her eyes looked into his, in an instant she was in her brother's arms.

"My little Pat," was all he said, as he pressed her to his heart; but her quick love caught the old dear note of tenderness in his voice, and her heart swelled with gratitude that, despite all that had happened the old sweet affection was there untouched.

Miriam's silvery voice was heard answering her, as if he escorted her through the doorway.

"Oh! no, I am not at all cold, thank you. So good of you to take us in. I feel we are behaving abominably, I have tried to make all sorts of apologies to Lady Agnes, and now, now I am waiting for Patricia to welcome me."

Her face had never looked more lovely. She was wrapped about in the most magnificent furs, wearing a long seal skin coat bordered with sable, a jaunty little cap to match set on her beautiful head.

She stood stretching out her small hands to Patricia, who released from her brother's embrace was now close beside her.

With her heart warmed and thrilled by that tender welcome from Danvers, the girl spirit of doubt and mistrust went from her considerably in this moment.

Miriam's voice was very sweet and soft, her face had a wistful look; but it was not her strong personal influence that touched Patricia, that moved her; it was the swift remembrance of what this lovely creature was to her brother's heart and life.

She held out her hands to Miriam and bending forward she kissed the young wife gently.

"Welcome home," she said, her voice uncertain, full of emotion.

Miriam of course made the most of the situation. She embraced Patricia tenderly, warmly, her eyes noting with swift disfavour the wonderful charm of this girl whom she called her enemy.

She said many pretty endearing little words, and gave an exclamation of surprise as Neville Blanqueville lounged forward to greet her.

No one present, not even the clever cynical man

himself knew the sudden rage Miriam felt at seeing him.

She was not fond of Neville Blanqueville, she had always had a doubtful feeling about him, she had never known how to accept his admiration, it had always a sarcastic flavour in her ears; and beyond this there was another and a more potent reason why Miriam should feel no considerable pleasure at meeting him.

She had not seen him for a long time, for Neville had been attached to the embassy in Rome during the last two years, and though he had been occasionally in England it had never chanced that Miriam had met him.

"What a surprise!" Lady Settefeld said, as she gave him her hand.

"And a pleasure also, I hope," was his laughing reply, "it is good of you not to have forgotten an old friend, Lady Settefeld."

"Oh!" Miriam said, merrily. "I never forget anyone—dear Lady Agnes please don't trouble to come upstairs with me—I can find my way so well, indeed I can; and you must be so tired. Danvers, do persuade Lady Agnes."

The Earl laughed and put his arm affectionately about his aunt's slight figure.

"You don't know Aunt Aggie. She is the most extraordinary, determined creature in the world. Pat," he looked back an instant, "you are coming with us, dear!"

"Of course Pat is coming," Miriam cried in the prettiest way. "I mean to obliterate myself for ever so long, so that you two may have a big gossip together. I promise not to be very jealous!"

The journey up the stairs was accomplished in a cheery fashion. Lady Agnes and Miriam went first, and Pat followed, her little hand clinging to her brother's big one.

Neville Blanqueville went back to his place by the hall fire; his uncle was enthusiastic in his admiration of Settefeld's young wife.

"A really lovely creature, something quite out of the ordinary run!" he exclaimed.

Neville Blanqueville agreed to this.

"Yes; she is really beautiful," he said to himself, he added in a meditative sort of way, "don't fancy she cared much about seeing me. Wonder how much Settefeld has been told about those days at St. Petersburg, when poor young Lindsey was out of his mind over *'la belle blonde fille'*. But this is indiscreet of me," the young man mused on, cynically. "There is no particular reason why Settefeld should ever know anything about Lindsey, he can afford to defy the past, he is king-to-day. She is more beautiful than she was; even than I imagined she would be—and yet—give me the other girl fifty hundred times! Patricia de Burgh is infinitely more beautiful in my eyes."

Patricia came down the stairs again, as he was thinking this.

Her carriage, her walk, was one of her greatest attractions; she had such a queenly air.

Her uncle began admiring her again.

"I can't take my eyes off you to-night, Pat," he said, as he scanned her from head to foot.

She laughed and coloured.

"I feel very like a carnival, but I am a victim to Maxton's excitement and love of display. Have you seen Mr. Musgrove, uncle?" she added, hurriedly, "I have a message for him from Frankie."

"Here he comes—nice chap. I am really sorry to lose him to-morrow."

They were all assembled about the hall fire about half an hour later when Miriam came down. Lady Agnes had soon attired herself, and the Earl had also hurried through his change of dress. Settefeld had an unfeigned feeling of pleasure in meeting Thorold Musgrove once again.

"This is a most agreeable surprise," he said, as they clasped hands. All memory of the little annoyance Miriam had managed to give him through this young man had gone from Settefeld's mind; he was only conscious a second time of a strong wave of liking and sympathetic feeling for Thorold. He was a type of man Miriam's husband honestly admired and respected.

He began speaking of Crowhurst, of Sir Francis and Lady Stapleton.

Thorold had to confess regretfully, he had not seen any of the family since the autumn.

"But I am going down there very soon," he added. "Lady Stapleton was good enough to want me for Christmas, but I had already accepted your aunt's kind invitation."

"You are going on there in a week's time better arrange to go with us," Settefeld said, warmly.

But Thorold shook his head smilingly.

"I am afraid I cannot arrange to go so soon as that," he said. His eyes were straying towards the staircase, his face was very pale—his heart beat in a fashion that made him feel ill and almost faint. Patricia, watching him from a distance, saw his face contract as Miriam appeared running down the stairs like a sylph.

She was all in white as she had been that bygone night at Crowhurst when her eyes and her lips had given him such promise of hope such encouragement.

Danvers went towards her.

"Mim, darling, here is another old friend waiting to greet you!"

She gave a little cry of course, but this time she had no sager or discomfort. Thorold was a very different person to Neville Blanqueville.

"Oh! how nice to see you again—this evening is full of pleasant surprises. How are you dear Mr. Musgrove? Ah!" with a pretty fluttering sigh, "you bring up visions of my mother and my dear old dad. You are so associated with my home."

Neville Blanqueville, listening only casually to this, had his eyes upon Patricia, and as a warm flush and a faint curious expression passed over the girl's clear, proud face, a sort of enlightenment came to the diplomat, not only of her feelings but of the situation generally. He looked now at Thorold's face.

The man had not the gift of self-concealment, at least not to such sharp eyes as Neville Blanqueville possessed.

"So, another victim," he said to himself, "and by Jove a very different one this time. This is no wild, foolish boy with drunk-muddled brain and excited mind—this is a man—one worthy of any woman's attention. Dear me, the interest grows. I never imagined when I promised to come down to Loamshire for my Christmas that I should find so much to interest me—most amusing really."

The dinner passed away in conventional and uneventful fashion. Patricia ate very little, her heart was too much stirred by the various emotions of the moment. It seemed almost like a dream to sit there looking at her brother's dark, handsome, happy face, listening to the tones of his well-loved voice.

The first rush of intense joy had passed from her, and with it the touch of softer feeling for Miriam; but, despite all her eager love, as the hours went by and she saw the tired haggard look grow greater on Thorold's face, Patricia felt the old cold barrier of distrust rise up between herself and her radiant sister-in-law.

She could see that Miriam had gone straight into the good graces of both her aunt and uncle.

Assuredly Lady Settefeld was charming. She seemed bent on winning all hearts; and she was so graceful, so refined, so beautiful, that Patricia found herself wondering vaguely at the force within her that resisted the fascination of this fair young creature.

Perhaps if chance had brought about her first meeting with Miriam under different circumstances—had Thorold and his pain been present not in reality—only in imagination, Patricia might have been won over in the same way as her aunt, for Miriam's fascination of manner was extraordinary. But with Thorold's white, tired face and hopeless eyes placed full before her—with the evidence of Miriam's cruel coquetry enforced by her way in speaking to this man—with a whole host of little memories called suddenly into vividness before her, Patricia felt with a sinking sensation that it was impossible for her to like Miriam any better than she had done—impossible to fall a victim to that airy prettiness,



PATRICIA HELD OUT HER HANDS TO MIRIAM, AND BENDING FORWARD KISSED THE YOUNG WIFE GENTLY.

to that touch of seeming tenderness and pathos that rang so hollow in her ears.

When Miriam sighed and spoke wistfully of her mother and of her old home, Patricia seemed to see herself once again in the hall at Crowhurst to enact over again that little scene in which the mother's voice had betrayed so completely the trouble in the mother's heart.

However, Patricia taught herself one lesson as she sat there, sombre and yet beautiful in an Eastern fashion, with the jewelled star gleaming from above her brows,—

"Though I may never lose this feeling, though time may never work a difference, I must never let this be known now. It is of Danvers I must think, my dear, my precious brother; his happiness must be assured now. He has forgiven me; he turns to me yearningly—he seems to crave for my love just as much as in the old days, she is now his wife! Were I to hold myself aloof all my life nothing would undo that fact. She is his wife; and since she belongs to him, since she is so much to him, she must be something to me also. I—I will try and teach myself to love her. I will be her friend, her sister, if I can. I wish I could love her without any teaching! It seems so cruel—so hard—so wrong of me! And yet—yet—there is no gainsaying the power of one's intuition. My whole heart went out in love, and that tender feeling of comfort to Miriam's mother before I had known her ten minutes. I had a curious sense of dislike of antipathy to Miriam the very first moment I came in contact with her. Who can explain these things? They are mysterious, but they are so strong—so very strong!"

Miriam, meanwhile, all gay and brilliant as she seemed, was in a mood of irritation verging on anger. It was by her wish they had changed their plans and paid this unexpected visit to the Blanquevelles.

It was not that she was tired, as yet, with her husband and his devotion, but Miriam was in a strangely restless condition; she wanted perpetual excitement—she wanted above all else to

return and begin her career of triumph over Settefeld's family—over Patricia in particular.

Her marriage, for various reasons, had been such a quiet one that she was rather eager to let the world see and hear of her as being very intimate with her husband's people. She was determined on one point, and that was to be as soon as possible, on terms of close friendship with Patricia. Not that Miriam cared for Patricia. They had not a thing in common, but it was her vanity, her pique, and perhaps a stronger and more practical reason that insisted on an intimacy with Pat. Now that Settefeld's mother married again and gone more or less away from England, much of the disagreeables for which she had prepared herself would vanish too. Patricia remained, but Miriam only smiled at this. Patricia would be arranged so easily.

"She will live with us, of course," she said to her husband, and when he had been silent she had laughingly shaken him. "Now, Danvers, I am going to have no nonsense about poor little Pat, all that is past and gone. I am going to make Patricia love me, she will come to us at Belton Towers, and we shall be as happy as happy can be."

Settefeld's answer had been to catch her in his arms and strain her to his heart.

"My darling, you are an angel!" he had said in a hushed sort of way. And, indeed, judged by appearances, Miriam was behaving most generously to Patricia.

It was her ambition that urged her to bury her fierce inclinations of wrath against Patricia de Burgh. There was no measuring the heights and depths and intensity of Miriam's ambition.

She had always sworn to rise in the world, and now she had risen, passing through the most tremendous difficulties to attain her goal; but attaining it at last, Patricia would be of assistance to her. She had need of Patricia, so she determined to shut her eyes to all coldness and difficulty with the girl.

By coming in this way to Loamshire she had taken Patricia by storm, and though as she sat

at the dinner table, and glanced now and then at the other girl, so proud, so cold, so unlike herself, and realised as she glanced, that Patricia would not be either malleable or easy, still Miriam was determined on getting her end.

"She must be my friend outwardly. I can do much, of course, without her now, but with her my road will be one long success, besides she is always a bulwark in case." The smiling lips grew pale as the fleet thoughts swept through Miriam's mind, her magnificent eyes went furtively to Neville Blanqueville's clean-shaven and cynical face. "What does that man know? I must pump him, but not to-night, he seems to me to imply he remembers too well. Ah!" it was a sharp sigh that rushed from Miriam's lips. "Just when I imagined I had accomplished all. I am so tired of preparing myself all the time for chance things that may never come. I hoped at least that now—this would be over. Oh! for a power to kill one's past folly!"

She sighed again, and Lady Agnes caught the sigh.

"You are tired, my dear," she said, bending forward to address Miriam gently,—

Settefeld, of course, looked at her anxiously.

"Have you a headache, Mimi?" he asked in a low soft tone.

She smiled at them both.

"I am quite quite well, and I am perfectly happy," she cried.

She spoke falsely. Happiness, even the poor sort of selfishness which passed for happiness, with a nature like hers, would never come to her unreservedly again. Remembrance of what she called her folly, was too keen for that; and if she could have had the power given to her to glance ahead and read the future, even Miriam's callous reckless spirit would have gone from her utterly, and her beauty would have faded out before the vision of the punishment that was fated to be apportioned to her. How merciful it is the future is veiled from our eyes!

(To be continued.)



"NOW, RUN ALONG, HEEB, WITH SELINA ANN," SAID MR. TRESSILLIAN, LIMPING TOWARDS A DOOR UNDER THE ORGAN.

THE SECRETS AND SHADOWS OF CASTLEGRANGE.

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CHAPTER XI.

ON reaching London we drove straight to 'The Lancaster'; there was a brougham from the hotel awaiting us when we arrived at Victoria station. My cousin Julian had the forethought of a woman combined with the promptitude in action of a man. The comfort of others, I think, was at all times regarded before that of himself.

At "The Lancaster" Mr. Tressillian, it appeared, was well known; an honoured visitor indeed, it would seem, judging from the manner in which our little party was received by the hotel's chief employés, from the manager himself downward.

Yes, Mr. Tressillian's suite upon the first floor, the rooms he invariably occupied when staying in or passing through town, were in perfect readiness for his reception; and then no less a personage than the manager led the way up the spacious staircase, with its dark marble pillars and its palms and its statuary, all tinted with faint and tremulous rainbow hues that were shed downward from a vast dome of coloured glass which formed the central decoration in the roof of the great building.

I thought the Lancaster Hotel a very magnificent place, and indeed was much impressed with everything I saw in it—after Thorpe and Lea Cottage it was in truth a great change! The Tressillian town house in Hans-square was at that time in the occupation of a New York millionaire and his family, who had got it on a lease, my cousin Julian told me; or we might have sojourned there whilst in London.

This being my first visit to the great city, my amazement and delight, of course, were everywhere immeasurable. The bustle and noise bewildered me at the onset, it is true; but the

unceasing movement, gaiety and change of the crowded streets at the same time charmed me indescribably. It was a new world, in brief; and the novelty of it all was delicious.

At "The Lancaster" Mr. Tressillian's man joined his master—a sleek-looking, middle-aged valet, Danvers by name, whose appearance was that of a respectable attorney, and who spoke half-a-dozen languages, including his own, with equal fluency and correctness. My cousin Julian had not brought Danvers down with him to The Lea, knowing that our accommodation there, either for man or beast, was limited; and that Prudence Best was autocratic in rule and in temper uncertain. Besides, Danvers was by no means the sort of servant to be packed away off-hand into any boot-cupboard or lumber-closet that one might happen to have handy and lumberless. No, indeed—he was a clean-shaven, dignified, well-mannered person; and at "The Lancaster" he was conveyed up to his room in the lift.

At the Lancaster Hotel we stayed for a whole delightful month; and Julian, ever kind-hearted and considerate, entreated Mrs. Joyce to remain there with me, as his guest likewise.

He said that there was so much to be done in a variety of ways, we could not possibly get along without superior feminine assistance; and experience proved that he was right. She—dear soul!—of course was nothing loth; life at "The Lancaster" suited Mrs. Joyce admirably; and when she left us at last to go to her friends at Blackheath, she declared with the ever-ready smiles and tears that she had not enjoyed herself so prodigiously since the long ago days when she was a young girl of seventeen. Then, she told us, she had stayed in London with her dear husband's people.

Ah, what did we not do and see during that wonderful month spent in London town!—the enchanting shops we visited, and the numberless things we bought!—never before in my life had I been the lucky possessor of so many lovely new clothes; I mean, all at once! I was to be handed over to the care of Madame Adolphe with a ward-

robe complete and extensive as it was new and modish, it seemed!

Sometimes I went out with Mrs. Joyce alone; frequently—indeed this was the rule—we went out all three of us together; and occasionally, when my whilom governess was fatigued and resting upon the sofa in her own room, I went out alone with Mr. Tressillian.

If he and I were walking, and not driving, the people we met in the streets or elsewhere invariably turned to stare at us, with curiosity not perhaps unminged with amusement—the little lame man with the beautiful grave eyes hand in hand with the small red-haired maiden, whose face was like a wild hedge rosebud or that of a pink-and-white Dresden china shepherdess with short bunchy Watteau skirts and a ribbon and flower-decked crook.

Some of the fat heavy-faced women who sat in their carriages by the pavement outside the shop doors used to put up their long-handled eyeglasses and smile openly; but these I instinctively knew could not be really nice people; wealth and position they might have—but breeding they assuredly had not. However, we soon got used to these rude staring folk; in fact ere long we ceased to notice the behaviour of them.

We went to theatres, concerts, and the Royal Italian Opera; to Hampton Court, Richmond, and the Crystal Palace; to the South Kensington Museum and the Zoological Gardens; to the Academy, the Grosvenor Gallery, and the Water Colour Exhibitions—and at the picture shows it was of course but natural that we should think and talk of Bertie Wilford and Mr. Aragon—to Madame Tussaud's and the British Museum; to Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London; and also to many another place of note and historical interest which I then saw for the first time and have never again seen since.

One beautiful July afternoon, when, as my cousin Julian explained to me, the London season was dying and would soon be dead, we drove about in the Park and mingled with a

great multitude of smartly dressed people who Mrs. Joyce said were "the fashionable world."

They seemed indeed to be driving and riding round and round a prescribed area, a beaten track, as if they were all members of one gigantic circus, and this was the show procession before the real performance; with crowds of other people leaning upon the railings, looking on.

So we drove round and round with the rest; sometimes being obliged to proceed quite slowly, because of the crush of horses and carriages together, and timid pedestrians trying to cross the roadway with stalwart policemen assisting them in the venture.

Dear Mrs. Joyce's delighted, vacant smile was something to mark and to remember; and so too was the new Regent street bonnet which she had seen fit to put on for the Park that day!

"Oh, what a lot of people!" I cried, with liveliest interest. "Look at them over there!"

"Yes, Hebe; this—just here—is Hyde Park Corner," Mr. Tressillian then explained to me.

At that moment a high-bred looking person, a gentleman every inch of her, sitting all alone in a wide and luxurious carriage, gave a perceptible start; and an expression of mingled astonishment and incredulity for an instant crossed her thin high features. She was but a few yards distant from ourselves.

"Can I believe my own eyes!" her quick glance in our direction seemed to say. Then the pale, proud-looking lady smiled very sweetly and bowed to Julian Tressillian.

He returned the winning salutation, gravely, but made no advances towards a nearer and more amicable greeting; yet somehow could not help fancying that the lady herself would willingly have stopped her own splendid equipage to renew acquaintance with one who was evidently an old friend of the past.

But Julian remained unmoved; gave no sign to our liveried attendants; and we drove leisurely on.

He read aright the mute questioning of my eyes; for he said pleasantly:

"That was Lady Agatha Dundas, little inquisitive. I knew her, Hebe, years ago."

"I think she is very laudable," I said seriously.

"Do you? Well, dear, I believe she was considered a beautiful woman once. But her friends would tell you, if you asked them, that she is what they generously call faded, *passée*, now."

When we got back to the hotel, and Mrs. Joyce and I were alone with each other, resting awhile before dinner, because we were going to the theatre afterwards, she said what a pity it was to be sure that Mr. Tressillian should live such a retired and secluded life, and not care in the least for society. Had he so willed, he "might have gone anywhere," Mrs. Joyce said.

The very best houses in London would be open to him, if he only cared to enter their doors. The first society in the realm would have gladly welcomed him into that jealous inmost circle of many outer and laxer circles, had he merely expressed the shadow of a desire to avail himself of the privilege.

Then, too, sighed Mrs. Joyce, Mr. Tressillian, she knew, belonged to two or three of the most exclusive clubs in town; but where indeed was the good!—for he never went near any one of them. How whimsical was Fate, was it not? she smiled mournfully, bestowing so often the world's richest gifts and advantages upon just those strange mortals here below who esteemed most lightly the coveted favours! Oh, it was a funny world, she thought!

For my own part, I thought it was a rather fortunate thing for ourselves, Mrs. Joyce and me, that my cousin Julian did care naught for fashionable society and Pall Mall. Because, had Mr. Tressillian been a society man and a denizen of club-land with its manifold pleasant temptations, never, surely, should we have fared so delightfully during the month that we sojourned at the Lancaster Hotel.

No; in that case, protectorless and guideless, we should not have gone about, hither and thither, half so much as we did, nor have seen half the interesting sights we did!

Nevertheless, as Bertie Wilford had hinted on

that evening when he dined with us at The Lea, it was cruel indeed to reflect that Nature had been, if not absolutely pitiless, at any rate bitterly capricious in making Julian Tressillian, outwardly, so greatly the inferior of his fellow men, and inwardly, as it were, so grandly their superior; with a sensitiveness of heart, with a true nobility of soul, in full proportion to the magnitude of his physical misfortune!

Was it likely that, with the heavy cross in life he had been called upon to bear, he would care with much ardour for the world and its ways? My kinsman Julian was in no wise introspectively or morbidly inclined; he was simply proud to aloofness in his affliction, and immeasurably self-contained. I know not how else to describe in brief a temperament at once so sweet and yet so reserved.

Oh, my poor kind gentle Julian, noblest and most generous of men!—how my own childish heart used sometimes to ache and to bleed for you, in those imaginative, untried days of inexperience and young impressions!

Ah, well, dear, Heaven knows best!

Of course Bertie Wilford kept his promise, and wrote me a letter whenever he could—telling me all the news it was possible to glean in Thorpe; and I likewise used to write to him whenever there was an opportunity, and told him as length about our wonderful doings in town. And we used, moreover, Mrs. Joyce and I, to send our kind regards occasionally to Mr. Aragon—because we thought that it would please Bertie; and in return, again through Bertie Wilford, Mr. Aragon used sometimes to send his kind regards to Mrs. Joyce and me. Also old Prudence, Bertie said, when she met him in the village, never failed to inquire after us, and hoped that we were well.

At last, however, like all things earthly, both good and evil, that memorable month of excitement and pleasure in London came to an end; and Mrs. Joyce made rueful preparations for her migration to Blackheath; whilst Mr. Tressillian himself wrote to his relative Mrs. Vasper at Castlegrange to apprise her that he and I—"his ward Hebe Fairburn"—were together coming down for a few days at the old house in Westshire prior to his, Julian's, departure for Southern Hungary and my own going away to Bath and Madame Adolphe.

"It is only right, Hebe, that you should see your future home; this home, my little cousin, that must always be yours so long as you remain in my care," he said one day. "As you know, dear, your mother herself was born and died at Castlegrange."

"Yes, I know," I said earnestly. "And indeed there is nothing in the world I should like better than to go to Castlegrange myself."

"That is well, then," he had answered. And the matter was settled forthwith.

So here was another momentous step in my young life's journey—thitherward at last, to Castlegrange!

Much sorrow and much suffering, in the by-gone time, had been known and lived through there, I knew. Would the gloom and the shadows and the deathless sad memories, which, like invisible ghosts, must surely tenant every silent chamber of that ancient house, in any wise, by-and-by, touch or influence as it were my own bright young careless life? In a dim inarticulate way I thought and wondered a good deal about this; and one restless night, when it was sultry and moonless, I dreamed that the souls of Doris and Doreen had returned with wild cries of lamentation and foreboding to haunt the familiar scenes of a vanished joy and regret. I awoke screaming, I remember, in a sort of indefinable terror that was nevertheless very real; and, moaning, fell asleep again.

The day came that we were to leave "The Lancaster;" and the manager and the waiters, with an over-powering show of respect, saluted us out of the pillared hall. The admirable Danvers had preceded us with the luggage.

Mrs. Joyce, in exceeding low spirits, protested that she must "see us off;" and accordingly she accompanied us in the brougham to Paddington station. The good creature tried valiantly to smile and be cheerful; but the brave effort was a doleful failure.

Soon, as I guessed she would, she brought out her pocket-handkerchief, and with unsteady hands lowered her veil. I should have tried my best to comfort her, only I saw that my cousin Julian was frowning, and looked uncomfortable. Plainly he judged that it was wiser to leave Mrs. Joyce alone; for sometimes a kind word is better left unsaid—it would do more harm than good.

Naturally this fresh parting was an affecting one. How in truth could it be otherwise? Since my babyhood no mother could well have been tenderer with me than Mrs. Joyce had ever been. She may not have been exactly a prudent governess always—but she had certainly, in her way, been a good second mother.

It was got over somehow—I cannot say clearly how. Mr. Tressillian himself limped away to the bookstall, and left us together in the waiting-room.

At the last, by the step of the railway carriage, Mrs. Joyce held me to her bosom as though she could never let me go.

"You are going to Castlegrange, Hebe darling," she said, huskily—"to Castlegrange at last! To me it all seems so sad and strange; I—I don't know why."

And she shuddered and sobbed in the same breath.

"To Castlegrange! Yes, I know I am. And you also, you know, are coming there again some day," Mr. Tressillian has said so. So don't cry any more, Mrs. Joyce—there's nothing really to cry for," I said, hopefully.

And in another minute the last bell had rung, and the long train had moved slowly out of the big dingy terminus; and Mrs. Joyce was left standing there, crying quietly under her veil, upon the platform—alone, and yet not alone; for life, with its hopes and sorrows, its passions and disappointments, its struggles and joys, was quickening everywhere around her!

CHAPTER XII.

As we sped along in the train, away through sunny green low-lying meadows, and past cool and shadowy-looking streams, winding and willow-bordered, with here and there a red farmhouse and occasionally a snug white mill, it suddenly occurred to me that I ought to thank my kinsman Julian for the many pleasures and amusements I had enjoyed through him during the past enchanting month in London.

So as nicely as I could I did thank him; and he seemed pleased, I think, to find that I was not ungrateful for it all.

He looked up then from the evening paper he was reading, and said with a smile,—

"I told you, Hebe, you know, at Lea Cottage that you must have a good holiday and enjoy yourself thoroughly before you went to Madame Adolphe; and I am glad to hear that you have managed to do it."

"I think it would be very odd indeed if I had not," I answered soberly.

He gave me a pleasant nod, and returned to the contents of his paper. The remainder of the journey, at least until we got to Reading, was gone through in silence; Mr. Tressillian still reading; I thinking rather anxiously about Castlegrange.

We rushed through Slough and Maidenhead stations, and halted nowhere until Reading was reached. There we had to alight and get into another train; for our London one was an express, and was going on to Birmingham.

At Reading we waited for about twenty minutes; and then we started for Waybridge.

It was growing dusk when the whole of our railway journey was accomplished—we had now before us only the four or five miles' drive to Castlegrange.

Waybridge seemed to me a very peaceful and quiet place, with the trees limned almost black against a wan green evening sky, a flamingo red streak resting low in the western horizon, and one or two small white stars already twinkling coldly above a sombre plantation of firs hard by the wayside station.

The air one breathed hereabout seemed exquisitely sweet and cool and dewy, with the scent of late clover wafted subtly over the dim fields, after the fret and fever and the ceaseless roar of mighty London.

The station master, recognising Mr. Tressillian, approached us obsequiously, raising his gilt-embellished cap.

"The carriage is here, sir," said the station-master, stepping in front of a tall, long-coated footman who was also on the look-out for our whereabouts; and with his own hand and a fine bow he opened the gate for us to pass out of the station precincts.

Mr. Peters had filled his post at Waybridge for a good many years; and I fancied that he eyed me with some furtive curiosity as I passed out into the quiet road with my lame kinsman leading me by the hand.

Did Mr. Peters, I wondered, know who I was, then—that I was in reality the little orphan daughter of that wicked Colonel Fairburn, who years ago had run away with Doreen Tressillian, and the young granddaughter of the old Squire Everard who, in his bitter disappointment at the waywardness of fate, had died of a broken heart?

Julian thanked the officious Mr. Peters for his attention and courtesy, and bade me enter the carriage. He lingered a moment himself by the open door, giving a few instructions to the ever-deft and ready Danvers, and then followed me.

I perceived directly that it was a very beautiful and roomy carriage, this from Castlegrange—perfect in all its equipments and painted a dark olive colour; and emblazoned with the Tressillian ensigns armorial—the griffin rampant and the bloody arrow. The ebony, thorough-bred horses were glossy as satin, and seemed, the noble creatures, to be conscious of their own high lineage! Both the attendants had powder in their hair, and I could not help thinking that the elderly fat coachman looked like a portly bishop in livery—truly an imposing old man!

Soon we were "bowling" along the deserted country road, from which here and there umbrageous narrow lanes branched off into the neighbouring woods and coverts; and in which, as we swiftly passed them, the milestones and hand-posts looked like patient, harmless ghosts airing themselves in the twilight—and so on towards the sleepy town of Waybridge, which, Julian said, woke up only on market-day.

By-and-by there came another stretch of lonely twilight road; and then, as it seemed to me, a sudden gloom descended from the fair evening sky; deepened mysteriously; and quickly hid every trace of the tranquil landscape around us. The swift, easy wheels of the carriage, too, seemed now to be travelling over mossy ground.

"How dark it has grown all at once!" I exclaimed, in a rather dismayed voice. "Will it—will it thunder, do you think?"

Mr. Tressillian appeared to be in an unusually meditative mood to-night. He had been silent in the train; he had spoken scarcely half-a-dozen words in the carriage during the drive from Waybridge station. But now at my tone of alarm he roused himself.

"Eh! What are you saying, Hebe? Thunder? Oh, no, I think not! This is the forest boundary, you know, and I perceive now that Blake is taking us by way of the forest lodge. It will be lighter again, you'll find, presently."

Later I learned that entry to the great demesne of Castlegrange was kept by the griffin-crowned iron gates of three separate lodges; situated one from the other at a distance of several miles. There were the thatched lodge, the west or principal lodge, and that known as the forest lodge; and we had just arrived at the last-named of the three.

A forest had, in my youthful ears, a rather awful sound about it; and I thought immediately of witches, and robbers, and ogres' castles, and the pathetic history of the Babes in the Wood.

I was beginning to feel nervous and bewildered, and not a little frightened indeed, in a vague, indefinable kind of way, now that we were at last within the shadow of the great old house and its sanctuary underground—the great old house, with its adjoining chapel, where my mother, Doreen, and her twin-sister, Doris, had

been born, had lived, had suffered, and now lay at rest; life's fitful fever for them over—in death re-united—to be divided never more!

Yet, after all, I reflected, what was there to be afraid of? Actually, there could be nothing.

Ghosts of poor dead folk had never hurt the living yet; and, besides, was not there the sustaining consciousness that my kind and ever gentle kinsman Julian was with me?—and so I somehow felt assured that neither danger could approach me nor evil befall me. Strong in this faith, I plucked up heart and determined to be brave.

Nevertheless, if my quitting Thorpe and The Lea had seemed altogether dreamlike and unreal, how infinitely more so now appeared to me this home-coming in the twilight to Castlegrange!

The massive iron gates of the forest lodge had been opened wide as we drew near; the carriage passed into the park; the great tall gates clanged to behind us; and we were bowling almost noiselessly along a fine avenue of beech and oak, which, presently narrowing and curving somewhat, sloped gradually to the beautiful cleared undulating valley in the midst of which uprose, with stately aspect, the ancestral home of the Tressillians.

Even in the late summer dusk one could well distinguish that the place was a huge and baronial-looking edifice, in parts turreted and mightily stanchioned; the buttresses being massed and garlanded with ivy, which, with the rank growth of years, had climbed upward to the coping of the very turrets themselves.

The whole building, one saw at a glance, was picturesquely irregular in outline; lights here and there shining forth faintly from the mullioned and lead-framed casements. The small upper diamond panes of these, I marked, were mostly of dimly-painted glass—like the exquisitely toned windows in the chancel of a cathedral.

The carriage swept round by the northern portion of the house; passed under a crumbling ivied archway, strongly suggestive of medievalism and monkish associations, and clattered into a roomy paved courtyard, whose grassy centre was occupied by a discoloured marble basin; once the abode of gold and silver fish that had moved and gleamed in the water beneath the broad flat lily-leaves floating there so stilly, like jewels seen in the dark.

But for some reason or other there were no fish beneath the lily-leaves now, and the fountain never played; within the jaws of the writhed monster, half-dolphin; half-beast, whence a crystalline spray had been wont to shoot skyward, soft damp mosses now grew and spread at will, and flowering lichens topped the marble basin's rim.

The chapel and cloisters formed the eastern boundary of this flagged hollow square; and through the pillared arches of the latter, festooned with many a ducky and fragrant creeper, we saw that a pale crescent moon had arisen and was lightly touching with silver, where shadow lay not, the undulating stretch of dewy sward beyond.

A large door in the courtyard opened—a monastic-looking, black-nail studded door, with stout iron-clamps and powerful hinges; and streaks of mellow light shot forth hospitably, reaching even to the neglected fountain in the centre of the quadrangle.

With interest and curiosity, which amounted to positive awe, I was gazing around me, when Mr. Tressillian, taking me by the hand again, said—

"Come, Hebe; let us get indoors. We are hungry, I'm sure, or ought to be so, after our journey from town."

The man-servant was still holding back the heavy door; and so, without further lingering outside, we entered the vestibule which, with its panelled walls and carved oaken benches alike nearly ebony in colour, served as a sort of ante-chamber to the barons' hall. Of this grand old apartment I had often heard—Mrs. Joyce speak. It was in truth a magnificent and an imposing chamber, and I was mute in it with shyness and admiration.

I had never in my life seen a larger fireplace

than that which adorned the barons' hall at Castlegrange. It had marble columns upon either side of it supporting a sculptured pent-house-like structure which projected, high overhead, above the spacious hearth below.

Now that it was summer-time, however, the cavernous void of the chimney was banked with palms and flowering shrubs, and presented, I had no doubt, a spectacle vastly different from that which perchance would greet a chilled traveller's eyes—say on a bitter snowy night in December. I could not help thinking that my kinsman Julian and I looked very little and insignificant, smaller than ever, indeed, it seemed to me, as together we stood there in that great bare lofty place with its magnificent timber roof; for albeit garnished lavishly enough with family portraits, faded limp shot-torn old banners

"That with the open'd door,
Seemed the old wave of battle to remember;"

grim empty suits of mail that looked like real armed knights of the lance and tournament; antlered heads of the big Norwegian elk; and carved oaken settles black with age—still the barons' hall, I thought, at that first twilight view of it, did somehow, notwithstanding, have about it a bare forsaken air, a suggestion of chill vastness and loneliness and gloom, which only the magic of many dazzling lights and the joyous presence of a numerous gala throng could ever relieve effectually or thoroughly dispel.

The cold desert of marble floor, chequered in black and white, it is true, was in places softened pleasantly and made easier to the foot with Eastern rugs and the skins of wild beasts; but these lay chiefly where doors opened into the hall—the centre of it was uncovered, was as chill and smooth as ice.

Overhead in the gallery—where minstrels had sat and played in the long ago time, to the rough and mighty barons feasting and carousing in the great hall below—in the gallery, which was reached by a noble double-stairway lurking amid the tinted shadows at the far end on the left, there were more family portraits and more ghostly knights of the joust; and there also, in this gallery above us, I noticed, opposite to the huge fireplace, an organ had been built with every appurtenance, its lofty pipes just gleaming in the dim purplish haze which, flooding softly in at the lovely old windows, seemed to be filling the barons' hall with the spirit of the approaching night.

The servant who had admitted us turned up the shaded lamps; and so gave the *coup de grâce* as it were to the fast dying twilight. Mr. Tressillian called to the young man, and said—

"Is dinner ready, Willis?"

"I believe so, sir. I will ascertain."

"Served as usual, I hope, in the oriel parlour?"

"Yes, sir—as usual in the oriel parlour, I know."

"Kindly send Selina Ann to me here, Willis," then said my cousin Julian.

"I will, sir." And the young man Willis vanished on his errand straightway, crossing the vast hall indeed, lightly and sure-footedly, just as if he had been used to slippery marble floors all his life long.

Soon a young woman, blooming, wholesome to look at, and in person admirably neat in every detail, made her appearance in the hall. She cutseyed to us in the regular old-fashioned and countessified manner, and said modestly—

"Willis says that you want me, sir!"

"Yes," Mr. Tressillian answered. "This, Selina Ann, is your young charge and mistress, you know, for the next week or ten days—Miss Hebe Fairburn. Take her now, please, to her room, attend to the unpacking of her luggage; and do for her all that she requires. And stay with her, mind, until she is ready for you to show her the way down to the oriel parlour. You must not," glancing at his watch, "be longer than a quarter of an hour; I cannot give you more; because dinner is waiting. Now run along, Hebe, with Selina Ann."

So saying, Mr. Tressillian himself limped away towards a door under the organ; parted the tapestry hangings before it, and there disappeared.

The girl so quaintly called Selina Ann in full then led me across the hall; not up either division,

though, of the noble oak stairway towards the gallery, but through a lobby and along two or three lofty passages until we came to another hall and another staircase; where a row of deep, splendid windows with small latticed panes all aglow with the Tressillian crest and other emblazoned shields of the family looked out upon a sad landscape of hilly parkland bordered by the distant forest.

We came at last to the corridor where my room was situated—a room which struck me as being a great deal too large and shadowy for comfort or ease of mind, after my pretty little light, pink-and-white bedroom at Lea Cottage; and Selina Ann, in spite of her countrified speech and ways, quickly and deftly unpacked my trunks, and brushed out my tangled red hair. She really seemed in every respect most handy and eager to please; and I found that I liked her on the spot.

In the given quarter of an hour, thanks to Selina Ann, I was ready to descend; and she piloted me safely down to the oriel parlour.

This parlour, I discovered, was a pleasant, rather old-fashioned dining-room, in reality, of just convenient size, upholstered in dusky red, with an oval table and high-backed chairs—altogether a cosy room, and evidently of a date throughout considerably more modern than that of any other part of the house which I had at present seen.

I learned on the morrow that the windows of the oriel parlour opened down into an alley which led one circuitously to a sweet old pleasurea that had once been the horticultural pride of Dame Lucy Tressillian—my own grandmother, and the mother of Doris and Doreen.

Mr. Tressillian was already seated at the table, awaiting my reappearance. The butler himself was standing at his master's elbow, bending towards him and saying something in a low voice. The young man Willis stood stiffly by the dinner-wagon behind my chair.

I noticed directly that the oval table was laid for three persons; but there were only present my cousin Julian and I. He said to the butler rather sharply,—

"Speak out! Did you say, Gregory, that Mrs. Vasper would or would not be down to dinner?"

"Would not, sir. Mrs. Vasper sent down word to Mrs. Bell early in the evening that she could not leave Miss Knowles to-night—she would dine upstairs. Miss Knowles was not well, sir, Mrs. Vasper said," Gregory, the butler, murmured placidly.

Julian sighed as if unconsciously; and that rare momentary frown of his crossed his forehead.

"Then we will not wait, Hebe," he said, turning gently to me.

I said nothing. I felt, indeed, too shy and strange to talk; so ate my dinner in silence; wondering much, notwithstanding, who was this Miss Knowles mentioned by Gregory, the butler, and feeling somehow greatly relieved to know that Mrs. Vasper would not join us in the oriel parlour.

I dare say it was very fanciful and absurd; but, all the same, I felt absolutely frightened to night merely at the bare thought of seeing Mrs. Vasper. At any rate, I would infinitely rather—so I told myself nervously—meet her first of all in broad daylight, than that this unknown woman should come upon me unawares amid the deepening gloom and the night shadows of Castlegrange.

When the servants were gone, and the wine and desert alone remained upon the table, I slipped off my chair and said frankly,—

"Might I go to bed—I was so tired!"

Mr. Tressillian acquiesced, and rang the bell at once; and that brought Willis, who in turn summoned Selina Ann again. So I said good-night to my kinsman Julian, and went off once more with my newly-appointed maid.

In the corridor upstairs I saw something pale and shadowy standing all alone in a dark corner close to the wall. I started violently; uttered a sharp broken scream; and clutched spasmodically at the gathers of Selina Ann's gown.

"Bless me, miss, there's nought whatever to be skeered at," said she soothingly. "Why, 'tis

only the popery jar! There's another of 'em over there—see!—and another down yonder. But my!" putting her hand on her waist, and breathing rather hard, "you *did* give me a turn, miss, with that screech you made."

"I—I'm sure I am very sorry. But I—I thought it—it was Mrs. Vasper," I stammered.

Selina Ann looked more astonished than ever. Her wholesome, full-moon face wore an expression that was almost comic in the unsteady light of the candle she carried.

"Oh, miss!" she exclaimed reproachfully, "how could you! Why, Mrs. Vasper is a very nice soft-spoken lady indeed. She would never so demean herself as to scrouch down in a dark corner upstairs, just a-purpose to frighten people out of their wits like that!"

"Oh, you really think she wouldn't?" I said anxiously.

"I am certain positive sure she wouldn't," replied Selina Ann, respectfully indignant. "You don't know her, miss."

I sighed with relief. I had been unjust then, it seemed, in my estimation of Mrs. Vasper, after all!

Selina Ann helped me to undress and get into bed as nicely as Prudence Best or dear Mrs. Joyce herself could have done; and I kissed the simple round red face on either hard cheek when she had lit my shaded night-lamp and left me to go downstairs to her supper in the servants' hall.

I soon slept. But in the middle of the night, as it seemed to me, I heard, or fancied that I heard, beautiful wild weird strains of martial music, subdued as if by distance, yet sometimes coming nearer—growing stronger—anon dying gradually away. Heaven knew whither, until only the sweet muffled sobbing of the solemn bass notes was just faintly and dreamily discernible.

Then rising above the spirit music—now once more growing in power and passion—shriek after shriek of a human voice could be distinctly heard; like the yell of the fierce north-wind riding triumphantly over the rush and roar of an autumn tempest.

But after a while these shrill, piercing, unearthly cries alike died away—the shrieks and the music were hushed together; and silence and peace and oblivion followed.

And yet in the morning I awoke feeling so refreshed, so well and happy, I could but decide that it was all a wild dream; and thought no more about it.

People, they say, young folk especially, do, as a rule, dream impossible things in a strange bed—particularly, perhaps, as was the case with me on that first night at Castlegrange, if the bed and its surroundings, in addition to their strangeness, their gloomy unfamiliarity, be ever so much too large for them!

(To be continued.)

ROUMANIAN mothers tie red ribbons round the ankles of their children to preserve them from harm, while Esthonian mothers attach bits of asafetida to the necks of their offspring.

THERE is a curious custom among the daughters of the House of Hapsburg, whose bridal trains, instead of finishing an honourable career in the ballroom, are bestowed after the ceremony on the church whose sacred floor they have swept. Only a short time ago, during the centenary celebration at Rennweg, the altar floor was covered with a sheen of satin and silver, mellowed by the breath of age, that had once formed part of Marie Antoinette's wedding garment.

"WHILE rice is white," says a commission merchant, "the size of the grain varies greatly, according to the locality where it is raised. I have seen rice grains as fine as grains of mustard almost, and again it is nearly as large as beans. As for taste, it is all about alike, but the amount of cooking depends altogether on the size of the grains. It takes an artist to cook rice properly. You have noticed the occasional black grains. Well, that is what is called hot rice and is so discoloured by being overheated in the process of milling."

THE SQUIRE'S SON.

—30:—

CHAPTER VIII.—(continued.)

LAURENCE, still gazing round him, dismounted. "Where's the gov'nor!" asked Jack of one of the men.

"Here I am!" exclaimed a voice which Laurence recognised at once, and the owner of the station stepped out of the house.

He started with astonishment as he saw Laurence.

"By the living Jingo, young sir," he exclaimed, "I did not expect to see you so soon!"

"I trust I am none the less welcome on that account," said Laurence, with his grave smile.

"Not a bit, not a bit. More, more!" retorted the settler, shaking hands. "Here, come aside, will you!" he added, as the group of men were staring with curious eyes and listening with all their ears.

Laurence followed him into a large, plain room, with great beams across the high ceiling, and furnished with rough, strong deal tables and chairs.

There was an exquisite perfume pervading the place, which was wafted in through the open windows from the natural flowers that shone and glittered in such profusion without.

The settler pointed to a chair, and, throwing his hat upon the table, reached a large black bottle from a cupboard.

"First of all, let me do the hospitable," he said. "There, man, drink to the new land and the new life!"

And, setting the example, he lifted one of the horn cups, which he had filled, to his lips with a cheery smile.

Laurence, with a grave smile, wet his lips and put his cup down.

"Now let us hear all about it," said Mr. Stewart. "Here, have a cigar;" and he handed one.

Laurence lit it, and, feeling more at ease at the first puff, said,—

"Mr. Stewart, I did not think when I listened to your description of your station that I should so soon visit it."

And the poor fellow sighed.

"Well," said the settler, with a meaning smile, "I did."

"You did," repeated Laurence, with his swift frown. "Why?"

"Well, no matter," replied the settler. "Here you are, you see, Mr. Darrell."

Laurence Harman lifted his head quickly, with a sudden flush.

"Not that name, please," he said. "If I remain here, and I came here with the intention of asking you to give me employment, you must promise me to forget, as entirely as I do, that there is such a place as the Dale, or that such a person as Hugh Darrell—" he faltered at the name, but went on, almost sternly, "ever existed."

Mr. Stewart held out his hand.

"That's a bargain," he said, "Mr.——"

"Laurence Harman, without the 'Mr.,' please," said Laurence firmly. "I have left the Dale and the old name for good, and, with your permission, will not trade upon the past. I am here, and elsewhere, plain Laurence Harman, cattle runner, herdsman, what you will."

And he shook his head, with a short and somewhat bitter laugh.

"Very well, Laurence," said the settler, who could guess at what occurred between the fiery Squire and his son, and was inwardly blessing the bad temper of the one and the wilfulness of the other for sending him such a fine, stalwart servant.

"Very well, it's a bargain, as I said before. We'll forget the past, and go in for the future, and that's not such a bad exchange as you might think, Laurence. By the way, I'll give you a regular rig in place of that sailor toggery, if you come into this room."

And he supplied Laurence with a thick tanned leather pair of breeches, a coarse, strong-looking

shirt, and a broad-brimmed felt hat—all new and after the pattern of the other runners.

Just as they were entering the long room, from which a most savoury smell was wafted, he stopped and said,—

"You haven't asked about the—the—wages yet!"

Laurence coloured. The word brought home to him for the first time the reality of his changed position.

"Wages!" he replied. "Give me plenty of work and something to eat and I shall feel myself heavily in your debt."

"Bah!" said the settler, touched by his tone of sincere gratitude. "I should be a knave if I took you at your word. We'll talk the matter over after supper. Come along."

The long table was groaning beneath the weight of huge dishes of roast antelope meat and beef, and a great tankard of water—of course there was no beer—glittered at intervals.

A score of native servants were handing round the plates piled up with meat, which three women, all old and ugly, were cutting as if for their lives.

Three men looked up as Laurence entered, and scanned his huge, lion-like figure approvingly.

These men worshipped strength; here it was in all its glory.

Three or four of them made room for him, and Laurence with a kindly "thank you" dropped into one of the seats beside Jack.

All there seemed equal, and it would have been difficult to detect from their manner that they were the hired servants of one man, for he was dressed as they were, and addressed them and was addressed by them with easy familiarity. Yet every man there knew that the sturdy colonist would be obeyed, and also that he would be obeyed at all cost.

They were a silent, rough, yet not brutal set of men. When they spoke it was to the purpose, but they eschewed all chat and gossip.

This taciturnity accorded with Laurence's frame of mind very well indeed, and he finished his supper with as little talk as they.

After supper Laurence accepted a pipe and strolled out into the veldt with the other men.

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTAIN REGINALD DARTMOUTH was not a very bad man, at least not at present. But money, or rather the love of it, is the root of all evil, and this journey down to Dale to see and snare the heiress of the Manor was the first step of a very promising line of wickedness and crime.

Many men marry for money, and see neither harm nor sin in so doing. Not a few, especially of Captain Dartmouth's class, think it rather creditable than otherwise, as well as profitable.

Yet the captain had some misgivings—not on the score of morality or righteousness, but on that of policy.

Was the game worth the candle!—that is to say, would the Squire's fortune be large enough to compensate for a bread-and-butter, school-girl wife!

Still it was worth an attempt to gain Mr. Darrell's estate and wealth, and with this resolution finally settled in his heart he passed through the lodge gates, and rang the bell.

Reginald was known to only a few of the old servants, for, hoping nothing from the Dale, he had neglected it, and the man who opened the door was a new comer, and consequently a stranger to him.

"Master's not at home, sir," he replied, in answer to Captain Reginald's question. "But if you will walk in I can send for him."

"Oh, don't trouble," said the captain. "Just tell Mrs. Lucas—I think that's the housekeeper—that Captain Dartmouth is here, and help that clumsy fellow down with my portmanteau, or there will be very little of it left."

Mrs. Lucas, who looked upon the members of the family she served as beings of a higher order than the rest of mankind, arranged her cap and hurried up.

"Well, Mrs. Lucas," said the captain, offering his hand—"how are you by this time?"

"I'm very well, thank you sir," replied Mrs. Lucas, very much flattered and delighted by the captain's condescension, "and I trust you are well, sir!"

The captain nodded.

"You've come quite unexpected, sir. The Squire will be quite took aback."

"Yes, I am rather unexpected. I hope I shan't inconvenience you, Mrs. Lucas."

"Bless you, sir, no!" replied the old lady, horrified at such an insinuation. "The blue room 'll be ready in half an hour. I think you like that, sir."

"That will do very nicely," said the captain, taking off his gloves. "And how is the world going on at the Dale, Mrs. Lucas?"

Mrs. Lucas sighed heavily.

"Ah, sir," she said, sorrowfully, "you've heard, maybe—"

The captain nodded and looked down at his boots.

"Yes," he said, "but only a little. Mr. Hugh has run away, hasn't he?"

"Run away, sir!" repeated the housekeeper, with suppressed indignation. "Not run away, but turned away. Bean't it shocking, Captain Reginald, to think as Master Hugh, the pride 'o all our hearts, should be turned away from his own home as one may say by his own father! Poor boy! poor boy!" and she wiped a sympathetic tear from her kindly old eyes.

"Ah," said the captain. "So the Squire turned him out. Pray what for?"

"Ah, that's where it is," said Mrs. Lucas. "No one knows the rights of it, but I b'lieve it to be something to do with Miss Rebecca—"

"Miss Rebecca?" replied the captain; "who is she?"

"Lor', you don't mean to say as you have forgotten Miss Rebecca, Mr. Reginald! Miss Rebecca Goodman, of the Warren, yonder."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said the captain, glancing languidly at the window.

"And what had Hugh to say to her that riled the Squire, eh?"

"That was just it," said Mrs. Lucas. "He wouldn't have anything to say to her."

The captain looked up.

"Oh," he said, "I see, I think. The play ran thus: Indulgent but somewhat irritable father—eh, Mrs. Lucas!—commands his son—dutiful but somewhat obstinate—to marry a certain lady. Certain lady rather old, ugly, and poor—"

Mrs. Lucas shook her head.

"No," said she, "Miss Rebecca bean't neither of them. She ain't over young, it's true, but she bean't ugly, and she's a'most as rich as the Squire himself. Why, Captain Reginald, all that park and the meadows down in the hollow there all belong to her."

The captain shook his head languidly.

The enigma was too much for him. He could not understand a man refusing to marry such a well-endowed individual, much less his preferring to throw up his inheritance than to do so.

"Ah, well," he said, as Mrs. Lucas placed a decanter of sherry on the table and some biscuits. "Ah, well, my cousin is a peculiar young man, but I don't think you need fret about it. He'll come back in a month or two, depend upon it—come back and marry the lady after all."

Mrs. Lucas shook her head sadly.

"No, captain, he won't. I know Master Hugh too well to comfort myself by saying so. He'll never come back to the old place any more. The master's been very hard upon him poor boy. Why, bless your heart, Mr. Reginald, we ain't allowed to mention his name, not one of us—nor in the village neither. It's just as if the poor boy was dead, every bit. Indeed, Miss Grace, bless her heart, do believe he is, for the Squire went and told her so, and Miss Rebecca backed him up."

Strange to say, the captain had not mentioned the girl who had taken his cousin's place.

He could scarcely have explained to himself why he had avoided the subject, but now the name struck him rather unpleasantly.

"Grace!" he said. "So that's the name of my new cousin, eh, Mrs. Lucas?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Lucas. "Yes, Mr. Reginald, that is the name, and a sweet name it is, and a sweet girl she is. She is out with the Squire. I'm very fond of her, Mr. Reginald. She's a Darrell, every inch of her. But I can't forget the poor boy I had the nursin' of ever since the day he was born, and it 'ud be unnatural if I could."

As Captain Reginald descended the stairs from his dressing-room the hall door flew open and his uncle and Grace entered.

The Squire had his whip in his hand, and Grace was in her habit.

"Hullo, Reginald!" exclaimed the Squire, coming forward with outstretched hand to meet Reginald, while Grace held back and knitted her black brows, as was her wont when in fear of an introduction. "Why, who ever thought of seeing you at the Dale?—I didn't."

"Nor I, sir," said Reginald, quietly. "I should have written, but I really had no idea of coming down until yesterday."

"Well, I'm glad to see you, letter or no letter," said the Squire, and, turning round, added,—

"Here, Grace, is a cousin for you—Reginald, this is Grace Darrell, my adopted daughter. Come and be friends."

For, although Reginald had advanced with a well-bred smile and held out his hand, Grace was still standing at the side, or rather behind the Squire, and staring, as it seemed, savagely, though she was only taking a good look at his face to see if she liked it—as she would have expressed it.

"Come, Grace—shake hands!"—said the Squire, irritably, and Grace held out her small gloved hand, which Reginald took and bent over respectfully.

"We shall be good friends I have no doubt," he said, "that is if Miss Grace is willing."

Grace nodded, but not very cheerfully, and then ran past them both upstairs.

She kept them waiting nearly ten minutes for dinner, during every minute of which Reginald Dartmouth had expected to see the Squire burst out into one of the passions he remembered. But no, he had changed.

Had Hugh been five minutes behind his time the Dale would scarcely have held his father. Grace entered the room ten minutes late with calm serenity, unrebuked save by a "Come, Grace, lass; the soup's getting cold."

She made no reply, and took a seat. Reginald Dartmouth took a look at her.

At first sight he had thought her beautiful; now, with the riding-habit replaced by an evening dress, he discovered that she was barely good looking.

Before the dinner was over he had decided that she was not even that—but that she was something more—prepossessing.

"Well," said the Squire, after bolting his soup and drinking a couple of glasses of sherry in silence—a silence shared by the others—"how's town looking?"

"Pretty much the same as usual," replied the captain, his well-bred, languid voice contrasting strongly with the Squire's quick, sharp one. "The usual amount of births, deaths, and marriages."

"Ah!" said the Squire. "And how are you getting on?"

This was rather a difficult question to answer. "Tolerably well, sir," then, turning to Grace, he said, in his lazy way,—

"Let me get you some sherry, Miss Darrell."

"No thanks," she said, shortly. "I don't like sherry."

The captain raised his eyebrows with mild astonishment, and the Squire said, with his gruff laugh,—

"Grace is a queer girl. Here, Reginald, give her some port," and he pushed forward the decanter.

But Miss Grace drew her glass away as Reginald was about to fill it, nearly causing some of the wine to drop upon the cloth, and said,—

"No, I won't have any port either, Uncle Harry."

"No wine!" said Reginald. "What can I get you—"

"Nothing!" said Grace, unused to such attentions, and not relishing the half-contemptuous

tone of his remark—"Nothing! Don't mind me. Get on with your own dinner."

Captain Dartmouth was not to be nonplussed by a girl of seventeen. He left her alone and turned to his uncle.

"How is the shooting this season, sir?"

"Oh, very plentiful," replied the Squire. "My men were telling me that the birds were never thicker."

His face clouded as he spoke, for he remembered that there was no Hugh to thin them now. "Have you brought your gun down?"

"No," said the captain; "I did not think of staying more than a day or two. I ran down for a change—London is insufferable just now, and I thought I should like to see you and the Dale for a little while."

"It's nonsense about not staying," said the Squire, earnestly. "Send up for your gun and go in at the birds—they want thinning down."

Captain Reginald thanked him.

"I'll apply for longer leave," he said. "I should like a pop at the birds."

"Ah, yes," said the Squire, "get the War Office to let you have a sick month or two, and recover your health in the ten-acre."

Captain Reginald smiled.

"I daresay I can get leave," he said, "without pleading the invalid."

Then they talked on town topics, drew a few mild scandals over the coals, and after some politics—of course the Squire was a Tory and equally of course Captain Reginald was also—finished the bottle of old port and joined Grace in the drawing-room, she having risen from the table at the appearance of the port and sailed out as silently and serenely as she had entered.

Reginald knew that the Squire would return to the dining-room and go to sleep, so he made himself comfortable in the easiest chair and prepared to tackle *la belle sauvage*.

When the Squire, muttering some inaudible excuse, toddled out, Captain Reginald rose and walked up to Grace, who was standing at the window.

"Are you admiring the sunset?" he asked, in his languid way, "or counting the pigs?"

And he nodded towards a drove going along the road.

"Neither," said Grace. "I've seen the sunset too often, and the pigs too, for the matter of that."

"May I ask, Miss Darrell," he continued, "what you are looking at then?"

"You may, but I'm not obliged to tell you," she retorted. "Did you come from London?"

"A very disagreeable one," he replied. "Ugly, crowded, dusty—not at all like Dale, nor anywhere else," he added, inaudibly.

"What in the world makes you live there then?" she asked, lifting her heavy brows.

The captain smiled.

"Because I am obliged," he replied, leaning against the window and stroking his moustache.

Grace looked at him up and down, as the saying goes, and returned to her contemplation of the road.

The captain waited for the next shot. It came—and pretty suddenly.

"What's your name?" she asked, turning her face round and eyeing him with calm curiosity.

"Reginald Dartmouth," he replied. "I am a captain in the army."

"Oh," she said, with great disappointment and some contempt. "A captain in the army. Have you fought any battles?"

"No," replied the exquisite, without a smile. "I have never seen one."

"Never—seen—a battle, and you're a captain! What's the good of being a captain if you don't fight battles?" asked Grace, staring at him.

"I don't know," retorted Reginald, beginning to enjoy the originality of the young savage. "I assure you, Miss Darrell, I have often asked myself the same question."

CHAPTER X.

GRACE WAS strongly built for a girl, she had a strong constitution, and she was proud of her muscles and sinews.

To be able to hold the dead Hugh's horse, or walk over the estate—a matter of sixteen miles altogether, there and back—and to plunge into a cold bath when the late autumn frost was silvering the window panes, were feats much more to be commended in a young lady than playing the piano or mincing French, as she called it.

Every morning as the clock struck six she rose, made a hasty toilet, and donned a little gray riding habit.

Treading softly down the stairs, so as not to wake the Squire, who never rose till seven, she ran into the yard where one of the men had orders to have her horse saddled.

Once mounted she was off—away over the hedges and across the country, her half-dried hair flying in the wind, and cheeks all aflame with health and excitement, her eyes as flashing as those of the horse, who enjoyed the mad morning gallop as much as his fiery rider.

The Squire had attempted to put a stop to her "freak" as he called it, but of course in vain, and had given in, stipulating that a groom should follow her.

This Grace agreed to, and kept her word.

The groom was allowed to start with her, and then followed—followed half a mile away, Grace having got clear of him in a quarter of an hour.

She had kept her word, but the Squire owned himself beaten as usual, and for the future my lady took her morning gallop alone.

The morning after Reginald Dartmouth's arrival Grace returned and entered the hall as he sauntered down the terrace for a lounge round the garden.

He glanced at her habit and held out his hand.

"I've been," said Grace, giving him the tips of her fingers, and snatching them away before he had time to close on them. "Been and come back," and she pushed the dark flood of hair from her flushed face.

"You're an early riser, Miss Darrell," he said, with a smile. "I have only just got down."

Grace threw up her head contemptuously. "You're lazy," she said.

"Very," he assented, quietly. "I always was."

Grace looked at him, rather nonplussed by his impassive face and immovable way of taking things, and moved on.

Reginald Dartmouth looked after her with a strange smile, and muttering "My savage coz should live in a habit—it becomes her," lounged into the stables.

"Are these all the cattle?" he asked one of the men, glancing at the stalls.

"These be all 'ceptin' Miss Grace's, sir, and the pony," replied the man.

"Saddle this gentleman for me after breakfast," he said, laying his hand on a powerful cob. "He's as fast as any here, I suppose?"

The man shook his head.

"No," he said, "Miss Grace's be the head o' 'em all. There be'n't one as can touch him."

The captain nodded languidly, and went in to breakfast.

"Good morning, sir," he said, shaking hands with the Squire.

"Ah, good morning, Reginald," was the response. "Been strolling round, eh?"

"Yes," said the captain, "I have been as far as the stables."

"See anything you like there?" said the Squire, sitting down and blowing his nose with great gusto.

"Yes," said the captain, "I have asked one of the men to bring me round a bright bay cob."

"Ah, good horse, and quite up to your weight," said the squire. "Where's Grace, I wonder? Here's the coffee and all the rest of it. Hi! Mrs. Lucas!" he shouted; but before that lady could appear Grace entered and, kissing her uncle, sat down to the urn.

"Well, haven't you got a word for your cousin, ma'am?" said the Squire.

"Seen him before," said Grace.

"Yes, we have already given each other the weather-orders," said the captain, peeling his egg. "I was fortunate enough to catch Miss Darrell returning from her morning ride."

"Ah," said the Squire, "she's an early bird. Don't know where she gets the notion from. Most of the young women are lie-a-beds nowadays."

"And most of the young men too," said Grace, looking over at Reginald without any attempt at disguise.

"That's meant for me, sir," said Reginald.

"Hah! hah!" said the Squire, "Grace says what she means pretty plain—a great deal too plain sometimes," he added, nodding at her; but she went on with her breakfast without retort.

"What are you going to do—ride, didn't you say?" said the Squire.

"I thought of going for a gallop," replied Captain Reginald. "Perhaps I can persuade you to accompany me, sir?"

"No, I can't," said the Squire. "Confounded gout. Grace will, though."

The captain looked over at her interrogatively. "Can I count on so much honour?" he said.

"Do you mean will I go with you?" retorted Grace. "I don't know—perhaps."

The captain bowed.

"You shall tell me after breakfast," he said.

After breakfast he lounged upstairs and exchanged his coat for a tight riding one, and put on his spurs.

Grace was standing by the window.

"Have you made up your mind, Miss Darrell?" he asked. "Which is it to be? Am I to go alone or will you come and show me the best ways and prettiest ditches?"

"If you wanted me to show you the way, why didn't you ask me?" she said, leaving the room.

Again the captain smiled, and, whistling an air from one of the operas, went down the terrace.

"Get the pony saddled for Miss Grace," he said.

The man touched his hat, and, turning the cob over to another groom, hurried to get the pony out.

They rode on for half an hour in a dead silence, the captain with a calm, indifferent look upon his face, the wild, rough girl frowning and pouting.

Presently she said,—

"Aren't you going to speak? You look like a dummy."

He bowed.

"Oh, yes," he said, quite coolly. "What house is that we passed just now?"

"The Warren," she answered, half sulkily, feeling sorry she had spoken.

"The Warren?" he said. "And to whom does it belong?"

"To Rebecca Goodman," she replied.

"Thank you!" he said.

And then he relapsed into silence.

"Well!" said Grace. "Is that all you are going to say?"

"That is all," he replied, in just the same tone.

"Then I shall go back," she said, turning the pony's head with a decided frown and jerk.

He turned the cob without a word and they rode home.

As they pulled up at the terrace he jumped down and held out his hand to help her to alight; but she pushed it aside and leapt to the ground without his assistance.

"How have you enjoyed your ride, Miss Grace?" he said, as they walked up the steps.

"I haven't enjoyed it at all. It wasn't a ride. I won't go with you again."

"Hush," he said, lifting his finger with an aggravating smile. "Don't say that, or you may want to break your word, and that is foolish."

A few days later Captain Dartmouth's horse arrived, together with his gun and a large parcel.

He saw the horse taken to the stable and groomed and ordered the gun and parcel to be carried to his room.

Grace was sitting in the dining-room, pretending to do some needlework—only pretending, for she never kept the needle in her hands for more than ten minutes, working fidgeted her, she said—and ran to the window to peep.

The captain caught a glimpse of her face behind the curtain and said nothing.

After luncheon he took his gun and accompanied the Squire in a walk.

The old man was pleased to have him, and they went over the farm, piggeries, cowhouses and all.

A week before Captain Reginald Dartmouth would as soon have thought of going down a coal mine as pottering round pig-houses, but now a change had come over the spirit of his dream.

He listened to the Squire's little bits of information and statistics with interest and asked questions that showed he was not indifferent to the extent and well being of the estate.

"Ah," said the Squire, as he turned to go back, and Reginald looked to his gun, "I ain't so young as you, Reginald, and can't look after things as they should be looked after," and he smothered a sigh.

Captain Dartmouth knew he was thinking of the outcast, who had been young enough and did look after things, and said,—

"Oh, I think everything is in capital case, sir. The men go about their work pretty well."

"But they want looking after," said the Squire, leaning on his stick and frowning at a hayrick. "They want some one down here every morning to set things going."

Captain Dartmouth swung his gun under his arm.

"If I can be of any use while I'm here," he said, "pray let me. If you like I will look them up in the morning. It would be amusement for me and, perhaps, let you feel more at ease."

The Squire thanked him.

"It's very good of you, Reginald," he said. "I couldn't think of troubling you though. You'd find it a nuisance and get tired of the whole concern in two mornings. Besides, you don't know anything of farming."

"I know but a very little, it's true," said the captain. "But I'm not too old to learn. And as for being bored with it, I expect I should feel rather the other way—get too interested. Soldiering's rather slow work if you haven't got any killing to do."

The Squire laughed grimly.

"Well," he said, "if you like to give 'em a look up and see after things a bit while you are down here, of course I shall be very much obliged to you. But don't go and bore yourself, as you call it, that's all. Throw it up when you're tired of it."

"Trust me to do that, sir," said the captain, languidly, and he walked off.

After dinner, when the Squire was snoozing in the arm-chair, and the other two were in the drawing-room, the captain rang the bell and sent for the parcel which had been sent with his gun.

Grace, turning over the leaves of an old book of travels, pricked up her ears—she had the usual amount of curiosity belonging to the sex.

The captain laid the parcel on the table and cut the strings. Grace looked up, and then catching his eyes returned to her book.

The captain took two large volumes from the paper and opened one out on his knee.

Grace peeped up and then looked down again.

The captain saw the sly glance and waited.

Presently she looked up again and caught sight of the large picture.

"A book," he said, without looking.

"I can see that," she said. "What book?"

"Come and see," he said.

But she refused, with a contemptuous shake of the head.

The captain turned over a leaf, and held up a page so that she could see it: a large lion with a deer under his claws.

"Oh, my!" cried Grace, forgetting her sulks and her pride in a moment. "Let me see!" and she sprang to his side.

"Oh," he said, raising his eyebrows, "I thought you wouldn't come. That's a lion."

She knelt beside the chair—as girlish and unaffected as a child—and begged him to show her some more.

He turned over leaf by leaf, reading scraps of the letterpress and explaining the pictures.

The following morning the captain's horse was

brought round, and he appeared booted and spurred for a ride.

"Where is Miss Grace?" he asked, entering the room where Mrs. Lucas was superintending the removal of the breakfast things.

"Here I am," replied that young lady herself from behind the curtains.

"Oh, here you are," said the captain. "I am going for a ride. Will you come with me?"

She did not hesitate this time.

"Yes," she said. "I want to see how your horse goes."

The captain's horse was a thoroughbred, and looked it, but Grace declared her Pussay could race him.

The captain shook his head.

"I think not," he said, with a smile that always irritated her.

"We'll try," said Grace, and, with a smart slash of the whip and a sharp dig of the spurs she was off.

The captain waited until she had taken a good start and then spoke a quiet word to his horse and the race commenced.

Grace had a good start and was well mounted, but Hugh's good old horse was more strong than quick, more brave than light, and the captain's thorough-bred steeple chaser crept on him after the first hundred yards.

Grace looked back with a bright flush on her face, and waved her whip saucily.

"To the barn," she said, pointing to one two fields off.

"Right," he answered. "Mind the gate and the fence!"

"Do you mind!" she retorted, and he saw her use the whip again.

They were going at a good pace now, making straight for a good gate and a stout fence a little farther on.

For the moment, as Pussay rose at it, he thought she had taken it short, and his heart beat quickly. Should the horse fall and the girl be thrown!

There was only her between him and the Dale! But it was not the first time by many a hundred that the old horse had cleared that gate, and he came down on the soft turf like a pebble and was off again.

Grace looked back in time to see the captain hop over like a feather and spurred on again.

Then came the fence, higher and more difficult to negotiate.

Again the captain looked with the same thought flashing through his brain.

But Pussay rose up with plenty of space, and there only remained the field. Now was the time to put it on. He just touched the silky neck and away went the steeple-chaser.

Grace heard the sudden spring and looked round just in time to see the captain's horse fall all of a heap on the other side of the fence, and the captain himself pitched headforemost into the field.

She uttered a cry of alarm and turned back.

"Are you hurt?" she cried, leaping down and standing beside him as he pulled himself together.

"No," he said "not a bit"—but his face was white—"have you ridden past the barn? If not you have not won!"

Here his lip twitched and he put his hand to his arm.

Grace looked alarmed.

"Oh, you are hurt," she said, laying her hand upon his arm, and speaking more softly than he would have thought she could. "Oh, I am sure you are; so sit down—here on this mound—I'll go—I—I don't know what to do. Shall I ride home for Uncle Harry?"

He shook his head.

"No, Grace"—it was the first time he had spoken the name without the prefix, and the girl noticed it. "No, Grace, wait a moment. Will you bring the horse? He is up I see and more hurt than I am, I dare say," he spoke, just as languidly and coolly as ever; and Grace led the horse, which did not seem at all injured, to its master.

He looked at it but kept his arm to his side.

"Ah," he said, "you ought to know a bird by this time, old fellow."

"Was it a bird?" asked Grace.

"Yes," he said, but dropped his eyes beneath her anxious gaze. "A bird rose under his nose as he went to take the fence. Poor fellow, it's the first he has missed for many a day."

"Oh," said Grace, "what's to be done?—Oh, I am so sorry."

"Are you, Grace?" he said, stopping in the stroking of his moustache and lifting his dark eyes to hers with a glance in them that made her shrink back.

Why she knew not save that her untutored heart told her the look was not love but a base and to-be-dreaded counterfeit.

"Of course," she murmured, dropping her eyes.

"I should not have thought it," he continued.

"I did not think you liked me well enough."

"Yes, I do," she said, looking at him quickly and dropping her eyes—not with love but with a subtle sort of fear. "Let us go. Can you mount? If you can't I'll ride off and bring the chaise round."

"No," he said. "The Squire must hear nothing of this, nor—for the matter of that—any one else. The arm's all right now, and we'll finish the race."

She held the horse for him and he mounted.

They rode on for a little while in silence, then he said,—

"Is there a stream near here? This arm of mine is beginning to bore me. I think it is a sprain. If so, the best thing is some cold water."

"No—no," said Grace. "There's no stream about here—we must go home. Stay, there's the Warren, just on there. See? Rebecca will give us anything you want."

And she spurred on.

Captain Reginald thrust his arm inside the breast of his coat and followed after.

At the door of the Warren a little basket chaise was waiting.

"Oh, Rebecca is going out," said Grace; but at that moment Rebecca Goodman came out at the door and said, in her timid, gentle voice,—

"Not going out if you are coming in, Grace."

And Grace, springing off her horse, whispered,—

"He's hurt his arm and wants some cold water."

Rebecca raised her eyes to the gentleman's face and answered,—

"Oh, my dear, you must introduce us."

And she walked up to the captain, who had already uncovered.

Grace looked puzzled.

What might Rebecca mean?

She didn't know, but, half guessing, went up to Reginald and said,—

"This is Miss Goodman whom you've heard me talk of. She says she'll give you some cold water; so come in at once—make haste."

The captain smiled, and, dismounting, bowed to Rebecca.

"Miss Darrell has only half done her duty," he said, in his languid way. "My name is Dartmouth, Reginald Dartmouth. I have hurt my arm—a mere nothing—a simple sprain."

"Oh!" said Rebecca, interrupting him and looking distressed—she would have wept over a canary with a sore throat. "Pray come in—a sprain is so painful. George, take the horses round. 'This way, Mr. Dartmouth!'"

And she led the way into the drawing-room and rang the bell.

"Sit down, Mr. Dartmouth. Grace, put your whip aside. Mary—to the servant—"bring in some cold water and a basin, and a bottle of Elixir Fluid."

The captain smiled and rose.

"I could not think," he said, "of giving you so much trouble. Had I guessed you would have been so much inconvenienced, believe me I should not have yielded to Miss Grace's advice."

"It is no trouble," murmured Rebecca, rather awed at the languid, high-bred London tone and the finished bow. "Surely you will have the water?"

"Thank you, but not in a basin."

"How then," asked Grace, who had been standing silently listening and watching. "How do you want it?"

"From the pump," said the captain, quietly.

"I think I saw one in the court. If you will allow me"—and he rose—"I will go and use it."

He walked out, and the two women followed him.

Turning his sleeve up to the elbow, he held his bruised arm under the spout and pumped.

His white face told how fierce the pain was.

Rebecca flushed. Grace caught hold of the handle.

"If you must have it in this stupid way I'll pump!" she said.

And pump she did, the captain thanking her gravely, and declaring himself cured by the operation.

"Well," said Rebecca, "I trust it has given you relief, but it's a singular remedy."

"One of the best there is for a sprain," said the captain, wiping his arm on a towel which a servant had brought. "It will cure even a bad one, and this is not that."

"I think it is," said Grace, in her short way.

"No, it is not," said the captain. "We could have got home without any care—well, but the Squire would have seen it, and then good-bye to our races for the future, Miss Grace. A man who could not clear a five-foot fence would not have been trusted to take care of a young lady who could, Miss Goodman."

Rebecca smiled feebly.

"Grace is able to take care of herself," she said.

"I am," said Grace.

Rebecca had only one meaning.

Grace might have had only one also, but to the man's ears both remarks bore two meanings.

Was this girl able to take care of herself?

"You must not ride home," said Rebecca, as they went back to the drawing-room. "I was going over to the Dale and will drive you back. The Squire will suspect nothing and it will be far better for you."

"You are very kind," said the captain; "but I assure you I am perfectly at ease again. I could ride a score of miles now with impunity."

"No, you couldn't," said Grace. "We'll go back in the chaise, Miss Rebecca, and thank you."

For once he let her have her own way, and they took their seats in the little pony carriage.

On the way the captain, still in his lazy, languid style, laid himself out to be agreeable, and succeeded so well that Miss Rebecca was surprised when the Dale came in sight.

Grace was silent and thoughtful, frowning as was her wont when ruminating. She was thinking of the glance that Captain Reginald had given her, and asking herself what it meant.

Grace had never read any novels and there had been no one to teach her what love meant.

The captain had erred in not taking her lamentable ignorance into account.

"Here we are and here is the Squire," said the captain, as the chaise drew up at the door and the Squire came down the steps.

"Good-morning, Rebecca. What, you two! What have you done with the nags—sold 'em or lost 'em?"

"We met Miss Goodman and accepted her kind offer of a lift," said the captain.

"The horses are coming over directly, Squire," said Rebecca.

"All right," said the Squire. "Will you come in and take a bit of luncheon?"

Rebecca declined, but Grace insisted, and, of course, settled the question.

In the middle of lunch a servant entered with a letter for the captain. It was marked "Immediate," and, begging to be excused, he opened it.

It consisted of only three lines, but they seemed to anger and annoy him, for a transient flash, too sudden and too slight to be noticed by the others, lit up his dark eyes as he read them.

"What time is the next train?" he asked. "I must catch it, I am afraid."

CHAPTER XI.

"BELLA, why did you send for me?"

The speaker was Captain Reginald Dartmouth. The person addressed, Bella Mervin, chief ballet dancer at the Royal Signet Theatre.

The scene was a drawing-room in Carlton-square. Captain Dartmouth had just entered.

Miss Mervin rose to meet him with a suppressed cry, half of surprise, half of love, the *danscuse* of the Royal Signet, loved Captain Reginald Dartmouth, and, for a miracle, the handsome captain loved her in return.

"Reginald!" she cried, springing towards him and drawing his face down to her slightly flushed and very beautiful one—"Reginald! You have come at once! How good of you!"

"I don't know that, Bella. Put foolish instead of good and you will be nearer the mark."

"Not foolish but good, I say again," she repeated. "But come and sit down; you must be tired. How cold your hand is. Fanchon shall bring you some chocolate. I am only just up."

And, after helping him off with his damp coat, which she flung with reckless negligence upon one of the satin fauteuils, she touched a small silver-gilt spring bell.

"Chocolate, Fanchon," she said to the French maid who appeared, and then, poking the fire till the blaze shot up cheerily, drew up an arm-chair towards it.

"Now come and sit here, Reginald, and rest awhile," she said, bringing forward a dainty little footstool.

The captain watched all these preparations for his comfort with an air of listless proprietorship, then settled down into the chair and drew the girl on to his knee.

"Now, Bella," he said, "perhaps you will answer my question."

"No, I will not," she replied, stroking his hand and looking at him with an arch impudence and an admiring expression in her blue eyes. "Not a word of explanation until you have had your chocolate, then, with a cigar in your mouth, and Bella at your feet, you shall hear what I like to tell you."

He nodded.

"So be it," he said, raising his eyebrows and smiling the smile only this girl saw. "But I warn you that your story must not take long in the telling, Bella. I must leave town to-night."

"No, no!" she exclaimed, with a look of entreaty, clasping her hands. "Don't leave me so soon, Reginald. Don't—oh, don't."

He was touched by the plaintive voice and by the sudden tears that sprang to her eyes.

Captain Reginald was not a "caressing man," but he drew the golden head to his breast.

"Bella," he said, in his grave tones, "you ruin me."

She drew herself away with a quick start and paled.

"I ruin you?" she said, "Reginald!"

"Ay," he said, "you melt me when I should be as ice; you soften me when I should be as hard as iron; you— Ah, Bella, Bella; where's the chocolate?"

He sipped the aromatic beverage for a minute or two in silence, looking at the dancing fire flame and smoothing the little white hand that lay in his.

Bella was content and waited.

"Another cup?"

"No," he said, "no more. And now, Bella, again, why did you send for me?"

"I wanted to see you," she murmured, half fearfully, and creeping closer as if by a caress to turn the edge of his anger aside.

His eyes grew colder and his voice was sterner as he said,—

"Bella, let me tell you a story you may have forgotten. Three years ago a small crowd of Parisian idlers were gathered round a girl who was dancing with a tambourine on the boulevards. An Englishman, stopped in his idle lounge to look on. After the dance the girl handed round her tambourine for the sous. One vagabond offered her a napoleon for a kiss. She refused. He insisted on the barter with roughness and caught her in his arms. The girl shrieked, and the Englishman interfered. The vagabond picked himself up from the pavement and the girl and the Englishman went off together.

(To be continued.)

HER SAILOR LOVER.

—30:—

(Continued from page 344.)

She did so, explaining how she had lain insensible in the dressing-room after her husband left her, and then had heard the report of the pistol, and gone into the boudoir to find him stretched, dying, on the floor. In a hushed voice, she repeated the words he had spoken,—

"It was Jack Craven!"

"From which I imagined that you and he had met, and had quarrelled, and that in a moment of passion you had fired the revolver," she added, in conclusion. "When the doctor came my first question was whether the wound was self-inflicted, but he said at once that such a thing was impossible, as the shot had evidently been aimed from behind."

Craven had listened attentively to her recital, weighing well each detail of it.

"I did not see Sir Reginald at all," he said, as she finished. "When you withdrew, I locked the boudoir door, and he must at once have gone round to the dressing-room, for a moment later I heard him speaking to you, and then I made my escape into the corridor. Janet was waiting outside, and she beckoned me down the back staircase and let me out through the little side door by which I had entered, into the shrubbery. It was then that I heard the shot. I have no doubt Sir Reginald suspected that the voice he heard was mine, and that was in his mind when he uttered those last words. Between the time I left the boudoir and your recovery from your swoon, someone must have entered the room. The question is—who could it have been?"

Angela shook her head; it was a question to which she was unable to return an answer. Nevertheless, her listless apathy had all vanished. With the belief in Jack's innocence, had come the desire to live, and to prove to the world that the stain of murder was not on her soul.

Once more the warm and fervid blood of youth coursed through her veins, the longing for liberty had reasserted itself. She felt that the walls of the prison cell to which she had hitherto been indifferent, were stifling her.

Ah, to be out once more in the sweet fresh air, to see the glad expanse of blue sky, and feel the strong breath of the wind sweeping across her face!

"On, Jack, save me, help me, get me my freedom!" she exclaimed, wildly, yielding to a sudden impetuous impulse, which would not be controlled. "I never realised how terrible it was to be a prisoner until this moment."

"Believe me, darling, I shall labour night and day for your release," he returned, eagerly. "I shall wire up to London immediately for the ablest lawyer, and the most astute detective, and it will go hard with me, if I don't bring the guilty person to justice at last. Heaven helping me, you shall be free in another day or two. Now you must answer me one or two more questions. You say the revolver found on the floor of the boudoir was one that your cousin had given you as a wedding present. Where was it when you fainted?"

"In its case, on the toilet table, I believe. At least, that is where I left it when I went to church."

"In the dressing-room?"

"Yes."

"Sir Reginald did not pick it up as he passed the dressing-table on his way to the boudoir, I suppose?"

"I don't think so. I did not notice that he did so, but then I was half distraught with excitement, and of course he may have taken it without my observing him."

"But then there is the doctor's evidence that the wound was not self-inflicted," mused Craven, speaking more to himself than to her. "No, my own idea is that the murderer must have come through the drawing-room while you were lying there insensible, and have picked up the revolver as he went. Had Sir Reginald any enemies?"

"Not that I know of. Besides, if it is as you say, how is it the man was not seen somewhere

about the house or grounds? A stranger could hardly have come in and found his way upstairs and then down again, without being observed."

"No one except Janet saw me, you must remember."

"But then you had been at The Towers before, and were well acquainted with the entrances and exits, therefore you had a certain advantage to start with. While as to no one seeing you—well, as a matter of fact, there were rumours in the village of your having been noticed as you came through the park."

"Were there? I did not know it. There is truth in your argument, however, and I incline to the belief that it could not have been a stranger. Perhaps someone in your aunt's household had a grudge against Sir Reginald or against you."

Angela started, and a curious, half frightened expression came in her eyes. Jack noticed it instantly.

"What are you thinking of? I can see an idea of some sort has occurred to you."

"It is a ridiculous one," she exclaimed, hastily. "I would rather not say it."

"But it might help me in my inquiries."

"It is too far fetched. No, I will dismiss it from my own mind. I don't know what brought such a notion into my head."

Their interview was ended abruptly by a warder coming in to announce that the visitor must leave. Poor Angela's heart sank as the clang of the door, and the drawing of the bolts outside told her she was once more alone. Oh, how terrible this solitude was to her now, and how doubly terrible the trial looming in the distance! Suppose Jack failed in his task, suppose no new evidence was forthcoming, and she was convicted on that given before the coroner—sentenced to die as a murderess!

The thought had never seemed half so dreadful before; it absolutely overwhelmed her with its horror. She flung herself on her knees, and buried her face in her hands, tasting the cup of humiliation to its very dregs.

Innocent people had never committed ere now of crimes which they had never committed, and it was more than possible that the same fate might be hers.

After awhile courage returned to her, and with it faith in her lover's efforts, she rose, and dried her eyes, recalling his assuring smiles, and hopeful words that another day or two would set her at liberty.

If human endeavour could compass it, his promise would be kept.

CHAPTER IX.

On leaving Angela Jack Craven's face grew graver. He had kept up a brave show of hope in her presence, in order to cheer her, but he was quite alive to the peril of her position, and the strength of the chain of circumstantial evidence that pointed to her guilt. Thinking over their interview on the way to the telegraph office, he remembered the curious changes that had come in her face when he asked her if she had an enemy, and he wished he had pressed her more strongly to tell him of whom she had thought—for that she had had a momentary suspicion he felt quite convinced.

Who had any reason to dislike her, he asked himself, and then started slightly as the answer occurred to him. Sybil Wharton had always been more or less at variance with her cousin, and he had heard it whispered before he left England to join his ship, that there was a likelihood of her becoming Lady Verney. Was it possibly of her Angela had thought?

Craven dismissed the idea—for the present at any rate, and after despatching his telegrams, he went to the police-station, and asked to see the inspector who had charge of the "Verney case," as it was called. The inspector proved to be an old acquaintance of his, and this made it all the easier for him to obtain the information he sought.

"I'm afraid there is no doubt that the lady is guilty," said the police officer, his manner

implying respectful regret. "It's a sad case, but it's pretty straightforward. It is admitted that Lady Verney was not in love with her husband, and the supposition is that at the last moment she regretted she had married him, and in a fit of frenzy took his life. You see, she was found with the revolver actually in her hand, and she refused, and refuses still—to say a word in her own defence."

"She will no longer refuse. She is quite ready to answer any question that may be put to her. I have just come from an interview with her, and she has given me an account of what passed," and he proceeded to repeat Angela's version of the morning's events. "When the murder was actually committed Lady Verney was lying insensible on the floor of the dressing-room."

The Inspector looked incredulous.

"You see," added Jack, "it would have been quite easy for anyone to enter the dressing-room, during her swoon, pick up the revolver, which was probably lying on the dressing table, and enter the boudoir, then to leave it by the other door which opened on the corridor."

"No stranger could possibly have done this," said the Inspector, decidedly. "He must have been seen by some one or another; besides he must have been thoroughly acquainted with the house."

"My own idea exactly. I incline to the belief that we shall find the guilty person in the household at The Towers."

The Inspector mused. Such an explanation had not occurred to him. He shook his head.

"Is there not one weak link in your chain of evidence?" went on Jack, urgently. "If so, I implore you to tell me. Remember a woman's life is at stake!"

The police officer hesitated a moment, then he said, somewhat reluctantly,—

"There is certainly one thing that puzzles me, and it is this. The revolver found in Lady Verney's hand was a four-chambered one, and when it was handed to me, it was loaded in every chamber."

"Then," exclaimed Jack, excitedly, "it could not possibly have been the one with which Sir Reginald was killed."

"Yes, it was—or at least, the bullet corresponded exactly with those in the other cartridges. The inference is, that after firing, Lady Verney must have reloaded the empty chamber."

"But no woman would have the presence of mind, or the cold bloodedness to do such a thing with her husband lying dead at her feet."

"One would think not, and yet it must be so. It has struck me more than once that she might have intended committing suicide."

"But even granting such a supposition, there would have been no necessity to reload, seeing that three of the chambers of the revolver were still loaded."

"That's so," admitted the Inspector, scratching his head in a puzzled fashion. "I am ready to admit that I don't understand it; at the same time, I don't see how it helps Lady Verney's case."

Craven was not of the same opinion. After leaving the police-station he bent his steps towards The Towers, determined to pursue his investigations there, and thinking deeply as he went. In the avenue, just beyond the lodge gates, he saw a trim little figure coming towards him, whom he recognised as Janet Graves, the girl who was to have been Angela's lady's-maid.

She started and seemed surprised at seeing him, and would have passed on if he had not stopped her.

"Why were you going to cut me, Janet?" he asked, with the pleasant smile that had helped to make him so popular. "Are you sorry to meet me?"

"I can't say I'm glad, sir."

"But why not?"

"Because," exclaimed the girl, with a sudden burst of tears, "if I hadn't been over-persuaded to let you see Lady Verney on her wedding morning, she might never have killed Sir Reginald. It's on my conscience that I did wrong."

"No, Janet," he returned, gravely, "it was I

who did the wrong, not you. As for Lady Verney killing her husband—she is as innocent of his death as you or I."

"I wish I could believe it—I'd give a year's wages to believe it!" cried Janet, with energy.

"It will be proved to you later on," he said, in a voice of calm assurance. "Meanwhile, I want you to give me all the help in your power towards unravelling the mystery."

"That I will, sir, and welcome. But I don't know anything that is likely to help you, I'm afraid."

"Now attend to me. After you had told Lady Verney that I was in the boudoir—I am speaking of the morning of the murder, remember—did you remain in the corridor?"

"I was at one end of it, sir, hidden behind the curtains that drape the archway leading to the servants' wing."

"So that you could see anyone entering the corridor or coming upstairs?"

"Yes, sir. I saw Sir Reginald come up, and I was so frightened I couldn't stir. He knocked at the boudoir door and tried it, but it seemed to be locked, so he went to the dressing room, and entered it. Directly afterwards you came out of the boudoir, and as you know, I led you down to the little postern door, and bolted it after you."

"And then?"

"While I was still fumbling with the bolts—they were rusty and I couldn't get one of them into its socket, I heard the report of the pistol, and I ran upstairs again."

"Did you see anyone in the corridor?"

"No. I fancied I heard a door shut, that was all. I ran down into the great hall, for I was too frightened to know exactly what I was about and then I followed Lady Wharton upstairs again, when she went into the boudoir."

"Was Miss Wharton with her mother?"

"She came a few minutes later."

"From downstairs, or from her own room?"

Janet looked a little startled at the question.

"Why, now you mention it, sir, I think she must have come from her own room, for if she had come up the stairs I should have been pretty safe to have seen her. I should think it was her door I heard bang as I came from letting you out."

Craven nodded, and then put another question. "Do you know if Miss Wharton has any firearms in her possession?"

"Yes, sir, she has a pair of pistols—or at least, she had. I happened to see them once in her wardrobe, when she had left the keys in the lock by accident."

"When was that?"

"About a week before Miss Angela's wedding. She never knew I saw them, so I hope you won't tell her, sir, for she's terrible hard on servants, is Miss Sybil, and I should be safe to lose my place. Though to be sure," added Janet, "she has changed a good deal since the murder. I never saw anyone alter so in my life. It's my belief she's a bit off her head, and I'm sure her mother thinks so too, for she won't let her go out for walks alone, she always insists on going with her. The day before yesterday, however, Lady Wharton was ill, and couldn't go herself, so she told me to follow her, and see that she came to no harm. I kept well behind, so that she shouldn't see me, and when she went in the Melcombe Woods, the trees hid me from her."

"But what did she go to Melcombe Woods for?"

"That's more than I can say. She made straight for the Heron's Pool, and then looked round as if to make sure no one was looking, and threw something right into the middle of the pool. It must have been something heavy, I think, for it seemed to sink at once, and she turned back, and came home immediately."

Jack changed his mind about going to The Towers, and instead of doing so went back to the police-station, and made arrangements to have the Heron's Pool dragged that same evening. He was very anxious to see what Miss Sybil Wharton had been at such pains to conceal in its dank waters, and his excitement did not lessen when it proved to be a revolver, matching in every particular the one found in Angela's grasp, and now in possession of the police authorities. The

inspectors, too, seemed much taken aback by the coincidence, and accompanied Jack to The Towers the next morning. They asked to see Miss Wharton, and were at once ushered into her presence.

Sybil was lolling listlessly in an armchair, but she started to her feet as she saw them, her face growing grey, while her fingers were clasped nervously together. Without a word Jack placed the revolver before her.

"Do you recognise that, Miss Wharton? It is the one you threw into the Heron's Pool two days ago—the one with which Sir Reginald Verney was shot."

Jack felt himself very brutal as he made this coup, but after all, the circumstances justified it. Sybil fell back against the cushions of the chair, every vestige of colour fading from her lips, trembling indeed from head to foot, but unable from extremity of terror, to utter a word.

"Shall I give you a short history of that revolver, Miss Wharton?" went on the pitiless voice. "It is one of a pair, and you gave the other one to your cousin Angela on her wedding morning. Whether it was part of your scheme I know not, but it was loaded in every chamber—as was also this one, which you probably carried concealed when you made your way into your cousin's dressing-room as she lay senseless on the floor. You passed through the room to the boudoir, and there you shot Sir Reginald Verney, whom you looked on as your false lover. But this was not all. In order to fix the guilt on your unfortunate cousin, you took the revolver belonging to her and threw it on the boudoir carpet, forgetting in the excitement of the moment to take one of the charges out, as you would doubtless have done had you been calmer. Then you determined to get rid of the compromising weapon, and for this purpose you threw it in the Heron's Pool. Have I stated the case correctly?"

The miserable girl, with a deep groan, sank on her knees and threw out her hands in appeal.

"Spare me, spare me! I acknowledge it was as you say, although by what mysterious means you discovered the truth I do not know. Great Heavens! you surely will not arrest me!" she shrieked, as the inspector stepped forward and laid his hand on her arm.

Twelve months later Jack and Angela were very quietly married in a London church. Not a single guest was invited to the wedding, for in the minds of both there lingered the recollection of that tragedy of a year ago, and since then of Sybil Wharton's death, which took place through the rupture of a blood vessel a week before the date fixed for her trial. As Jack placed the ring on Angela's finger, he swore to himself that if devotion could ensure happiness, then indeed a golden future spread before his beautiful wife. It would not be his fault if she ever had cause to regret linking her life with that of "Her Sailor Lover!"

THE END.

It was required of every father in Athens to teach his sons to read, and to swim, and to also compel them to learn a trade. If he neglected the duty last named, a son was not expected to support his father in his old age.

It is said that the word "silhouette" originated from the niggardiness of a French minister of finance, named M. Silhouette. Under his rule the meanest tricks of economy were practiced, and the courtiers had their portraits painted entirely in black, with profile view, claiming that M. Silhouette had left them so poor that they could not afford anything more costly.

This observatory on the summit of Mont Blanc is now complete. It was first constructed at Meudon, France, and transported in pieces to the top of the mountain by the railway to Chamounix, and from thence by porters and snow trolleys of special make. It is founded on the hard snow of the peak, the base being over 30 feet long by 16 feet wide.

FACETIE.

HE (in anger): "I don't know why we men marry, anyway; women are such fools." She (sweetly): "That's just the reason, dear."

HE (pleadingly): "Would you love me if I were rich?" She: "I can't say as to that, but I'd probably marry you."

MRS. DE SCHWEINE (at a steamship office): "I want a first-class passage to Havre." "Yes, ma'am." "And I insist upon having a smooth passage, no matter what the cost."

MR. MCBRIDE: "They say that poor Wine-biddle is dying by inches." Mrs. McBride (with deep concern): "Is he? And he is such a tall young man too!"

MOTHER, reprovingly to little girl just ready to go for a walk: "Dolly, that hole was not in your glove this morning." Dolly, promptly: "Where was it then?"

HE: "You are very provoking! You talk as if our engagement were not going to result in marriage." She: "You are more provoking. You talk as if it were."

SHE: "Tell me, now, have your affections always remained constant?" He: "I can truthfully say that they have—though I admit that their object has often changed."

ADA: "No; Priscilla Oldfield will never marry unless she finds her ideal." Ida: "What sort of a man is her ideal?" ADA: "A man who will propose."

PRISONER: "But I would rather tell my own story. Don't you think it would be believed?" Counsel: "Yes, that's the trouble. It would carry conviction with it."

"CAN you tell me what that picture represents?" "That is Queen Cleopatra. Have you never heard of her?" "Never in my life. I so seldom read the papers."

ASPIRING POET: "I'll set the Thames on fire yet." His Wife: "I do hope you will, dear. Would you mind making a fire in the kitchen grate—just as a matter of practice, you know?"

FATHER: "I've just found out that the strange young man who comes to see you has been borrowing money right and left." Daughter: "Isn't that lovely! He must be a nobleman in disguise."

MRS. CHATTERS: "Dear me, the new curate is such an interesting young man." Mrs. Next-door: "What did he talk about when he called?" Mrs. Chatters: "I told him all about baby's new tooth."

"WOOLGATHER is wretchedly absent-minded." "What's he been doing now?" "Went to a dinner-party yesterday, and apologised profusely at the end of the dinner for the poorness of the spread."

CHOLLIE: "Old man Casher drove that boy of his to drink." Harry: "Why, I thought the old story was that one man could drive a horse to water, but forty couldn't make him drink." Chollie: "But, my dear boy, this wasn't water."

SHE: "You told me I was the only woman you ever proposed to." He: "True." She: "True, is it! I've heard that you've been engaged to three women." He: "All of them were widows, my love. They didn't wait for a proposal."

PARIS. Concert Manager: "Madame Igby's cold has made her so hoarse, we'll have to cut out that Italian aria. It's too bad; she was our biggest card." Leader of the Band: "Dot eese all right, tell her to come and sing a Sherman village song."

LITTLE NELLIE was put to bed at an early hour one day for some misdeed, and forgot to take with her her dearly-loved doll, Elizabeth, who usually shared her couch. Presently she called, "Mamma, I want Elizabeth. Please bring Elizabeth up to me." This was refused, but the demand was repeated until finally her mother said, "Nellie, I am afraid I shall have to come up to smack you." Quick came the tearful response, "Well, when you come up, please bring Elizabeth."

COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER (to hotel clerk): "What do you charge a day?" Clerk: "Twelve and six." Commercial Traveller: "You have rates for 'travellers,' of course?" Clerk: "Oh, yes, sir." Commercial Traveller: "How much are they?" Clerk: "Twelve and six."

"But, papa," wailed the young woman, "you can have no idea how he loves me. He is willing to die for me this very minute." "Well," said the old man, stroking his chin thoughtfully, "I don't know that I have any objection to that. I was afraid he wanted to marry you."

TOMMY (in tears): "Ma! Fred Tibbins busted my new hat!" Tommy's Mother: "The naughty boy! What made him do it? Did you do anything to him?" Tommy: "No, mother, nothing. I was just running into him with my head for fun, an' he didn't dodge!"

MAUD: "I don't know whether Charles really loves me or not." Her Brother: "What did you give him for a birthday present the other day?" Maud: "A box of cigars." Her Brother: "Did he smoke them?" Maud: "Yes." Her Brother: "You may be sure he loves you."

SHE: "The play was excellent except for one thing." He: "And what was that?" She: "The time extends over three months, and it shouldn't be more than a week." He: "I'd like to know why?" She: "Why! Because the same servant girl stays through it all."

MRS. HESPECK: "On the 25th of next November we will celebrate our silver wedding. Don't you think we ought to kill the fatted calf and ask in the neighbours?" Mr. Hespeck: "Kill the calf! I don't see how the unfortunate animal is to blame for what happened twenty-five years ago."

"Oh, you horrid men!" she shrieked. "I know what you are. You're burglars." "Well," exclaimed Bill Bludgeon, "if that ain't like a woman! No, marm, yer mistaken. We hain't burglars. We're jes company that hez to 'pologize for furgittin' ter bring 'long our callin' cards. See?"

SIR AUGUSTUS LACKCASH (to tailor): "My son tells me that you have allowed him to run a bill for three years. I have therefore come—." "Oh, pray, Sir Augustus, there is really no hurry." Sir A. L.: "I know that, and therefore I have come to tell you that in future I want to get my clothes from you, too."

MRS. NEWRICH (irate): "I've a good mind to sue you for your work on that last order to engrave my silverware." The designer and engraver: "What is the trouble, madam?" Mrs. Newrich: "Trouble! Why, I told you not to spare any pains to make it the swellest job you knew how, and here you've put just the same coat of arms on every piece!"

"My friend," said the shabbily-dressed man, as he approached the unsophisticated youth at the street corner, "would you like to know the secret of enormous wealth? I have it, but circumstances prevent my using it. I will sell it to you for two bob." "Well, what's the secret?" said the young man, as he passed over a silver coin. "First," said the shabbily-dressed man, as he prepared to move rapidly round the corner, "first you get a lot of money, and, secondly, you keep it."

At a well-known West End club a Mr. Adams, leaving the club on a very wet night, was much disgusted at finding his umbrella taken by somebody else. He immediately put a notice on the board as follows:—"Will the nobleman who has taken my umbrella kindly return it at once!" A member of the club committee on seeing this was intensely horrified, and called a meeting to consider it. Mr. Adams was asked to appear before them, and it was pointed out to him that, although it was true that there were many noblemen in the club, it was very offensive to imply that one of them had taken his umbrella. Mr. Adams was, however, ready with his defense, and said that on looking in the club book of rules he had discovered Rule No. 1: "This club shall consist of noblemen and gentlemen"; and he was sure that no gentleman would have taken his umbrella, therefore it must have been a nobleman.

SOCIETY.

PRINCESS ELIZABETH OF BAVARIA is said to vastly enjoy the novelty of concealing her identity, and being able to behave "like every one else."

QUITS the newest thing in the way of dress fabric will soon be woven from an apparently very unpromising substance—wood.

THE Empress Frederick gave a tea and Christmas tree to the poor children of the neighbourhood at Cronberg.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS HENRY OF PRUSSIA are to come to England in the spring on a visit to the Queen.

THE Duke of Coburg is to be permitted to retain his appointment as honorary colonel of the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Edinburgh Artillery Militia.

THE Queen of Roumania's Christmas gift to small Prince Carol was a superb quilt, on which her Majesty has been diligently working for weeks past, and which is a wonderful example of art and skill.

THE Queen gives annually each Christmas and New Year's time, hundreds of small money presents away to deserving people, the lists of which are never published; besides, at Christmas her Majesty never forgets her poor relations, or those who are in her service, civil or military, all of whom receive Royal cheques.

THE Prince of Wales has consented to attend the annual brigade training and review of the Royal Staff Yeomanry and the Royal Warwickshire Regiment at Lichfield, in May next. The regiments form the eighth brigade of the Fourth Division of Yeomanry Cavalry, of which the Duke of Sutherland is the commanding officer, whose guest the Prince will be.

TRAIN-BEARING seems to have gone so utterly out of fashion that the Duchess of York's bridal robes were shortened purposely, and merely trailed in elegant style along the ground; whereas, the bridesmaids who respectively followed the Queen, the Princess of Wales, and several other Royal ladies to the altar were each accorded a clutch at the voluminous drapery borne by the heroine of the day.

IN a few months Princess Victoria Melita, who completed her seventeenth year as recently as the 25th of last month, will become the wife of her cousin, the Grand Duke of Hesse. Both bride and bridegroom-elect are special favourites of the Queen, who has considerably refrained from offering any opposition to the betrothal of the Royal lovers, even though their relation is rather too close to render the union, in the eyes of many people altogether desirable. The Grand Duke is said to be desperately in love with his bright and pretty cousin.

COLONEL BIDGE was recently sent to inspect the Villa Fabbricotti before it was secured for her Majesty. He has given directions for the various alterations which will have to be made during the next two months, including the addition of electric bells, and of a lift which is to run to the first floor, where the Queen's own apartments are to be. A number of internal changes will have to be made, and most of the furniture for the Queen's rooms, (bedrooms, dressing-room, and sitting-room) will be sent from Windsor early in March, her Majesty's arrival being fixed for Thursday, the 22nd of that month. The Queen intends to stay at Florence for between three and four weeks, after which it is now most likely that her Majesty will proceed direct to Coburg, where she is to be the guest of the Duke and Duchess at their palace in the town, where a suite of apartments is to be redecorated and refurnished for the Queen's use, and a lift will be placed in the house. It is probable that there will be a family gathering at Coburg, including the German Emperor and Empress, Prince and Princess Henry of Prussia, the Grand Duke of Hesse and Princess Alex, and the Prince and Princess of Leiningen. The Queen will stay there for about a week.

STATISTICS.

A PERFECTLY proportioned man weighs twenty-eight pounds for every foot of his height.

In engineering enterprises one man is killed for about every £50,000 spent on the work.

TWENTY-FIVE per cent. of the population of England have their lives insured.

STATISTICIANS claim that the earth will not support more than about 5,994,000,000 people. The present population is estimated at 1,467,000,000, the increase being 8 per cent. each decade. At that rate the utmost limit will be reached in the year 2072.

GEMS.

HABITS grow stronger by indulgence.

A WISE man will make haste to forgive.

REASON loses her deputy, in proportion as she has yielded to temptation.

It ought to be the first endeavour of a writer to distinguish nature from custom.

THE great men of the ancients understood how to reconcile manual labour with affairs of state.

IN cases of doubtful morality it is usual to say, "Is there any harm in doing this?" This question may sometimes be best answered by asking ourselves another, "Is there any harm in letting it alone?"

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

GINGER BEER.—Slice four lemons and crush two ounces of ginger, add one and-a-half pounds of white sugar and two ounces of cream of tartar. Pour on the mixture two gallons of boiling water, and when nearly cold add one teaspoonful of barm. Bottle it next morning, and tie down the corks; in two days it will be ready for use.

JAM PUFFS.—One cup of flour, one cup of dry mashed potato, one level teaspoonful of baking powder, and a pinch of salt. Rub in three tablespoonfuls of beef dripping; mix with enough cold water to make a stiff dough. Roll very thin, cut into rounds, wet the edges, put a spoonful of jam on each round. Fold over and press the edges together, lay them on a greased tin and bake ten minutes in a hot oven.

TOMATO SAUCE (English recipe).—Put what tomatoes you have in an earthen jar and set them in the oven till soft, then rub all through a fine sieve and then weigh the juice; to every three pounds of juice one pint of vinegar (Chili is best), one teaspoonful of salt, three small cloves of garlic pounded, one teaspoonful of ginger, one teaspoonful of pepper, juice of a lemon; boil all up till as thick as cream, let it cool; bottle in wide-mouthed bottles and cork tightly.

BREAD OMELET.—Housekeepers who have too much principle to throw away stale bread, and who cannot bring their families to relish bread pudding, will find they can put their loaves to practical use by making what an experienced mother calls "bread omelet." Cut the bread in very thin slices—and there is nothing that one can slice so thin as stale bread—and dip the slices in beaten eggs. Fry in butter. A most substantial, economical, and satisfactory dish for breakfast.

BANANAS.—In the tropical climates, where the banana furnishes the principal article of diet, the inhabitants have found numerous methods of utilizing this delicious fruit, which render it at once nutritious and palatable. They boil it, they bake it, as we do sweet potatoes, they peel it, cut it in slices and fry it in butter, they mash it into a paste and dry it in the sun as we do apples and peaches. They make it into puddings, pies, comfits and preserves, and even smother it in sugar until it is candied fruit. In every one of these ways it is both pleasant to the taste and wholesome as an article of food.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Japanese have invented a new and superior kind of steel.

THE most ancient catacombs are those of Egypt—over 4,000 years old.

ROSE-LEAF jam is a common dish in Roumania, where roses are grown by the million.

PLANTS placed under blue glass will starve, because they cannot absorb carbonic acid from the atmosphere.

PHYSIOGNOMISTS state that first impressions in the study of countenances are nearly always the most reliable.

THE name "Brazil" means "red wood," or "land of the red wood." The original discoverer called it "the land of the holy cross."

HOTEL beds in Ceylon are made up without any covering whatever, the heat of the climate making even glass in the windows too much.

A BOX or drawer in which are placed knives, forks and spoons is to be avoided, as the constant turning wears the most prominent parts very quickly.

IN the harem of the Sultan of Turkey the supreme authority is invested in his mother, and she alone is entitled to go to and fro in the harem unveiled.

IN computing the age the Chinese always reckon back two years from the celebration of the first birthday; or, in other words, as though the person had been 1 year old at the time of birth.

IN the West India Islands, Nubia, and Soudan, whistling trees are found. Peculiarly shaped leaves and pods, with a split or open edge, when played on by the wind produce the strange sounds.

SOME of the adulterations found in beer are cocculus indicus, capsicum, ginger, quassia, wormwood, calamus root, caraway and coriander seeds, copperas, sulphuric acid, cream of tartar, alum, carbonate of potash, ground oyster shells, nuxvomica, picotum, and strychnine.

AMONG the multifarious duties which demand the attention of the Calcutta police, the capture of sharks in the Hooghly finds a place. During the past twenty years rewards have been paid for the destruction of those marine man-eaters, and recently the Bengal Government laid down a scale for these payments.

A JAPANESE audience, when they wish to express disapproval of a bad play, do not hiss or hoot, or make any hideous and inconvenient noise; they merely rise to their feet and turn their backs to the stage, upon which the curtain immediately descends, and the play is forthwith tabooed.

THE word "Finnon," as applied to smoked haddocks, is derived from the fishing village of Findon (pronounced Finnon), on the sea coast, eight miles south of Aberdeen, where haddocks are said to have been first smoked for the Aberdeen market by the fisher-folk. Though many fishing towns and villages have for many years been producing haddocks similarly treated, they still retain the name of Finnon.

"CROWD POISON" is the newest name given to the bad air that prevails in crowded, poorly ventilated halls. The excess of carbonic gas is alone responsible for the headache, feeling of suffocation, &c., frequently experienced through the breathing of a contaminated atmosphere. Some yield much more readily than others to this combined exhalation from many systems, and persons are overcome by it who can withstand the air vitiated from other causes.

A VERY amusing game has been invented. It is played upon a board with pieces which are the same in shape as those used in Halma, but for the purposes of the new game represent rabbits and ferrets. The object of the game is for the ferrets to catch the rabbits before they reach their imaginary burrows. Considerable skill is required to play "skeddaddles," as the new game is called, with great proficiency, but amusement may be obtained from it the first time it is played; in this it resembles Halma.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

F. BOLTON.—Publisher not known to us.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—We must decline to advise.

ROGER.—We have no memorandum of the date.

LITTLE GOLDIE.—Banns of marriage stand good for three months.

NICK NICKLEBY.—Jamaica being a British colony there is no consul there.

SUFFERING TOM.—We should say cod liver oil would do you all the good in the world.

HORACE.—An enlistment of a recruit is not complete until he has been sworn in.

IGNORANT YOUTH.—The London address of the Archbishop of Canterbury is Lambeth Palace.

QUESTER.—Oil of aniseed is a lure principally used to attract vermin from their holes.

B. J. G.—Five penny stamps may be affixed to the face of a postal order and will be allowed for.

FRED.—The Royal Regiment of Artillery is the only artillery regiment that has the title "Royal."

MARK MARKHAM.—There is no good book on the subject you are interested in, at least not a cheap one.

C. M. J.—The word "lantern" occurs only once in the Bible—in the Gospel of St. John, ch. xviii. ver. 3.

BILLY.—The proper person to apply to is the clerk to the School Board.

SWEET WILLIAM.—You will find all particulars in the Education Act, which may be obtained through any bookseller.

CONSTANT READER.—The process is a secret one, known only to the trade, and, of course, there is no book on the subject.

ONE IN NEED OF INFORMATION.—You would get information as to the movements of particular regiments by addressing the War Office.

RONALD.—You ought to instruct another solicitor to take the matter out of the hands of the defaulting solicitor.

A SLENDER LILY.—To add to your weight, partake of food containing the most starch and sugar. The result desired may follow.

A VERY OLD READER.—No license necessary to a private club hiring a hall for dancing; if it were to be opened to the public the case would be altered.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—There is a poem entitled "Pauline" by Robert Browning, published in the collected edition of his works.

W. W. K.—Each Board regulates the punishments in the schools under its control as it thinks fit; there is nothing on the subject in the Education Act.

LAWRENCE.—There must be at least twenty-one days' continued residence of one of the parties in the parish in which the marriage takes place.

O. S. L.—Tar consists of resinous matter, acetic acid, oil of turpentine, and various volatile empyreumatic products, and is coloured with charcoal.

BORBY'S SWEETHEART.—The constable is bound to give or show his number, when asked to do so civilly by some one with whom he has interfered, as the latter thinks unfairly.

SCHOOLBOY.—The word Pharaoh was not, strictly speaking, the name of an individual, but of a class or race. For ages all the Egyptian kings called themselves Pharaohs.

WORRIED COOKIE.—It is said that chocolate-cake can be kept fresh by wrapping it tightly in buttered paper and putting it in a tin box away from all other substances.

INCOGNITO.—There are several homes where inebriates are received at the cost of their friends, and probably you could get a list by writing to the Inspector of Homes for Inebriates, Home Office, London.

ADMIRER OF THE "LONDON READER."—The lines quoted will be found as follows:—"The man that hath no music in himself," &c., "Merchant of Venice," Act 5, scene 1. "There is a tide in the affairs of men," &c., "Julius Caesar," Act 4, scene 3.

BERNARDO.—Give him a good rub with castor oil; he may lick some off and sicken himself slightly, but that will not injure him in the least; renew the application once or twice; slightly warm the oil, and it will rub in all the readier.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—There are in almost all cities, homes and hospitals for incurable children. In many cases it depends on the disease with which the child is suffering and the ability of the parents to provide for its wants.

C. G.—Be natural always, quiet in tone, moderate in statement, generous in sentiment, and slow to take offence; if you are introduced to the lady, as she is a person of superior birth, you will lift your hat and bow, but must not offer your hand except she invites you to do so.

A TEN YEARS' READER.—After seven years, if a wife marries again, having reasonable grounds for believing her husband to be dead, she cannot be convicted of bigamy should the husband prove to be alive; but the first marriage, and not the second, is the legally binding one.

AN INQUIRER.—There was no "bill for the disestablishment of the Church" before the House of Commons. There was only the Welsh Suspensory Bill, brought in by Mr. Asquith, the Home Secretary, and intended to prevent the creation of new vested interests in the Church in Wales.

AMBITIOUS ONE.—Neither advice nor assistance is of much avail to young writers. The best way is to write something and send it to some publication. If it comes back, try again. There is no royal road to success in literary work, and those who seek for it only waste time.

R. A. S.—It is hardly likely your parrots are being killed by the food they are getting; their chief article of diet should be canary seed, a little hemp occasionally, or rapeseed, also unground oats (corn), and Indian corn; let the latter be boiled, as it is somewhat constipating; a bit of lettuce (dry), or groundsel, or a bit of ripe apple.

HARRY'S LOVE.—Everything pertaining to such gifts depends upon circumstances. If the parents are well-to-do they may purchase a house and furnish it or may merely provide furniture, jewels or other personal property. It is a good plan to make an investment so that the bride may draw a certain amount for her personal use.

A LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—Young ladies, we think, should be encouraged to take an interest in public affairs. It is not necessary to make them devote any particular time to their study, but a knowledge of what is transpiring around them, as noted in the daily papers, is of importance as enabling them to take part in conversations on political subjects.

MAVOURNEEN.

I AM thinking to-night of the dear past, Mavourneen,
Its scenes are imprinted on memory's page;
There is naught can efface those fond recollections,
And the music of youth seems to sweeten with age.
A halo of brightness seems ever to linger,
And cast its soft rays, like the coming of dawn;
No hand of the painter, be it ever so gifted,
Can place on the canvas those scenes that are gone.

Mavourneen, Mavourneen, the sunshine and music,
The songs of the birds 'neath that bright summer sky
Have haunted forever the years intervening,
And in visions the friends of my youth have been nigh.
In my dreams I have sat by that old-fashioned fireside;
As I listened, I heard those sweet songs sang again;
Oh, why did I wake from this dreaming, Mavourneen,
To wish for the past, but to still wish in vain?

The sunshine, the music and songs of the present,
May enrapture the hearts of the youth of to-day;
But to me they are all cold and cheerless, Mavourneen,
Their pathos seems lacking when you are away.
How swiftly the moments would pass in your presence,
While our fancy recalled the dear past o'er and o'er;
Mavourneen, Mavourneen, could I but recall you,
To wish for the past, but to still wish in vain?

J. H. S.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—Frozen plants should not be put near the stove to be thawed out, but placed in the dark where the temperature is nearly freezing, so that they can thaw gradually. If severely touched with frost it is best to remove the frozen parts, that new stems may be forced out from the buds below. Water freely, and finally bring them to the ordinary temperature for house plants.

TROUBLED DORA.—As you have no wish to break your engagement, we can only advise you to be as circumspect in the treatment of your other admirers as you possibly can. Jealousy is a sort of insanity with some people, and if it cannot be reasoned out of the sufferer's mind, we know of no way to get along with him or her, save by striving to avoid giving the slightest cause for complaint.

GRACE.—Beat to a cream a halfcupful of butter and gradually work into this one cupful of sugar. Add one ounce of chocolate, melted; also two unbeaten eggs. Beat vigorously for five minutes, then stir in half a cupful of milk and lastly one cup and a half of flour with which have been mixed two teaspoonfuls of baking-powder. Flavour with vanilla. Pour into a buttered shallow cake-pan and bake for half an hour in a moderate oven. When cool spread with glace frosting.

META.—Stew a quarter of a pound of macaroni in veal broth for twenty minutes; cut it in pieces six inches in length, and lay half in the bottom of a pie dish; season well with salt, pepper, and mace. Place over it a layer of minced ham and veal, seasoning the meat, and putting alternately macaroni and meat, filling up with partly cooked tomatoes. Pour over equal quantities of veal gravy and cream; cover with thin puff paste; bake for twenty minutes and serve hot.

FLORENCE MARY.—First have your linen a little damp. Then make a basin quite hot with hot water. Put your starch in and moisten it with hot water instead of cold. Then pour in your boiling water slowly stirring vigorously till it gets clear—don't make it too thick, but thick enough to pour off the spoon—then stir in to each two tablespoonfuls of starch (dry), half an inch of composite candle, and two drops of turpentine. Stir till your candle is melted. Then starch your linen in the usual way. Hang it up to get quite dry. Then damp it well, and leave it tightly rolled up till next day, when it will be fit for ironing. To make it glossy, press it heavily with a good heavy iron after you have ironed it, and this starch makes a good gloss.

F. H.—Seal oil is buried in the ground in bags of skin. Meat is heaped upon platforms built among trees which are peeled of bark in order to keep bears from climbing up them. Little sticks with sharp points upward are buried in the ice to distract the attention of the bears from the provisions overhead. Another kind of cache is in the shape of a strong pan, the main supports of which are standing trees, with brush and logs piled on top to keep out wild animals.

ANNIE.—Wash the marrow and pare them, cut them in quarters and take out all the seeds; put the skins and seeds in a jelly pan covered with water, and boil them half an hour and strain. Cut the marrow up in inch pieces and weigh them, put three quarters of a pound of the sugar to each pound of the marrow and one teaspoonful of the bollings of skins, and to each two pounds one lemon rind and juice. Put the sugar and water on to boil, then put in the marrow and the lemon, and boil. One teaspoonful essence of ginger may be added; the preserve does not thicken or jelly readily; to assist this apple juice may be added, but the best course is to boil well.

YOUNG HOUSEKEEPER.—Have a shelf cut about two in quarters yards in length and one quarter yard in width out of a pine board; fasten it firmly upon two iron brackets with screws, and then screw the brackets to the place upon the wall where the shelf can go and be most useful. If the outer corners be rounded, the shelf will look better when it is covered. Cover it with a pretty cretonne, tacking the cloth smoothly to the board; then make a curtain about a quarter of a yard deep; sew on the edge a cheap jute or fancy cotton fringe of the colours in the cretonne, and tack the upper edge neatly over the top, covering around the edge of the shelf. Over these tacks sew a narrow gimp.

B. H. K.—The names and lengths of the greatest rivers of the world are as follows: Amazon, 3,600 miles; Nile, 3,000; Missouri, to its junction with the Mississippi, 2,900; Missouri, to the sea, forming the longest in the world, 4,100; Mississippi, proper, 2,800; Lena, 2,600; Niger, or Jobla, 2,600; Ob, 2,500; St. Lawrence, 2,300; Madeira, 2,000; Arkansas, 2,000; Volga, 2,000; Rio Grande, 1,800; Danube, 1,000; St. Francisco, 1,300; Columbia, 1,200; Nebraska, 1,200; Red River, 1,300; Colorado, in California, 1,100; Yellowstone, 1,000; Ohio, 950; Rhine, 950; Kansas, 900; Tennessee, 800; Red River of the North, 700; Cumberland, 600; Alabama, 600; Susquehanna, 500; Potomac, 500; James, 500; Connecticut, 450; Delaware, 400; Hudson, 350; Kennebec, 300; Thames, 230.

A CONSTANT READER.—The origin of the proverb, "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," is thus stated by the Greek poet, Lycophron, "Ancus, son of Poseidon and Alia, was a king of Lelagus, in Samos, who took especial pleasure in the cultivation of the grape, and prided himself upon his numerous vineyards. In his eagerness he unmercifully overtaxed the slaves who worked there. A seer announced that for his cruelty he would not live to taste the wine from his grapes. The harvest passed safely, and then the wine-making, and Ancus, holding in his hand a cup containing the first ruby-drops, mocked at the seer's prophecy. But the prophet replied, 'Many things happen between the cup and the lip.' Just then a cry was raised that a wild boar had broken into the vineyard, and the king, setting down his untasted cup, hurried off to direct the chase, but was himself slain by the boar."

LOVE OF THE "LONDON READER."—According to the language of stones, the one associated with the first month of the year is the garnet, which means constancy. February claims the purple amethyst, which is said to bring the virtue of contentment. March claims the bloodstone, which means courage. Those who are born in April must wear a changeable, dazzling diamond, the meaning of which is innocence. May is represented by the emerald, which is supposed to bring success in love to those who wear it by right of their birth month. June claims for her children the pearl, the meaning of which is purity. Those who are born in July must wear a ruby, which brings to its children nobility of mind. August claims the moonstone, which is said to bring conjugal fidelity. To those who are born in September the sapphire brings success and prevents evil. The opal, supposed by many to be unlucky, belongs to October, and to those who are born in that month it is said to bring happiness and hope. November is represented by the topaz, which means that those who wear it rightfully by reason of their birth may claim fidelity and friendship. To those born in December the turquoise is said to bring a prosperous life.

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